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CLASH OF THE TITANS

INSIDE DC'S BIGGEST EVER SUPERHERO MOVIE



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HOW WARNER BROS IS GIVING THE GOLDEN AGE ITS DUE
THE FIRST WORD ON JUSTICE LEAGUE AND BEYOND



**HUNTSMAN
COMETH**

Why this could be
2016's surprise hit

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The shocking truth of
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THE HOFF WAS ONCE A JEDI???
THE TOXIC AVENGER
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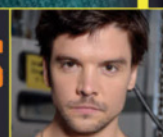
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GET EXCITED ABOUT GHOSTBUSTERS

By the time this issue's hit shelves, the first footage for Paul Feig's *Ghostbusters* movie may or may not have aired. Either way, we're excited to see what he has in store. Having helmed some of the funniest films of recent years, he definitely has the requisite comedy credentials, and what's more, virtually all of the original talent are on board in some capacity. Even if you're not convinced yet, give it a chance. Feig hasn't let us down yet, and we're sure he won't now.



We're living in a new era of filmmaking, and no film better encapsulates this than *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*. Not only will Earth's two greatest heroes meet together on the big screen for the first time; they herald a world in which the Justice League can finally unite.

Yes, Marvel has been there before, but they had it easier; their films were tailor-made from the beginning to slot nicely together. DC's heroes are infinitely more disparate entities, and as a result their movies are far more risky, especially when they've already been done before so brilliantly.

Yet you have to admire Zack Snyder and co's ballsiness for daring to step out of the shadow of Donner, Burton and Nolan to present their own takes on the Man of Steel and the Dark Knight. We certainly do – a case we put forward in our bumper behind-the-scenes exposé on the fight of the century.

And the excitement doesn't end there. The cast of *Daredevil* tease another epic smackdown as the Man Without Fear looks all set to bump horns with Jon Bernthal's Punisher; we go behind the scenes on *Game Of Thrones* Season Six with industry insiders, and director-and-star combo Jeff Nichols and Michael Shannon

discuss the making of sci-fi classic in the making *Midnight Special*.

But it's never a bad time to look back. We're especially excited with what we've got in store in our TimeWarp section this month, from the story of how David Hasselhoff became a knock-off Jedi and the making off Neil Marshall's horror hit *The Descent*, to an account of working with Jim Henson on cult hit *The Storyteller*.

We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we did putting it together.

Steve
Steve Wright
Deputy Editor

PORTAL

06 Independence Day: Resurgence

Find out what's bringing the aliens crashing back to our cinema screens.

08 The Flash

Keiynan Lonsdale on how Kid Flash will change the series.

09 Doctor Who

Say farewell to Steven Moffat and hello to Chris Chibnall.

13 Legion

What we know about Marvel's newest TV outing.

FEATURES

20 Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice

The masterminds behind the highly anticipated clash of comic-book titans speak.

30 Evil Geniuses

What happens at the Evil Genius Convention...

34 Batman's Forgotten Creator

The story of Bill Finger, Batman's long-forgotten – and finally credited – co-creator.

36 Game Of Thrones

The latest speculation, rumours and theories on the upcoming season.

42 The Huntsman: Winter's War

Director Cedric Nicolas-Troyan reveals all on the sequel

46 Daredevil

Charlie Cox, Jon Bernthal and Elodie Yung tell us what we can expect from Season Two.

52 The Punisher

Creators Garth Ennis, Gerry Conway and writer Steven Grant on the character and the 'unmakeable' series.

56 Damien

Get the lowdown on the *Omen* prequel.

60 Midnight Special

The cast and crew on what makes midnight so special.

REVIEWS

68 Deadpool

Was the Merc with a Mouth worth the wait?

69 High-Rise

Did the high-rise meet our high hopes?

And... TV Shows

The Librarians, *Supernatural*, *Doomwatch* and more.

BOOK CLUB

86 Essential Read

Discover the world of Ray Bradbury's classic *Fahrenheit 451*.

90 Beginner's Guide to Alternate History

Discover the sub-genre that changes the world as we know it.

And... Interviews & Reviews

Snowpiercer's new sequel, *Terminus*, Adrian Barnes on his debut novel *Nod*, and more.

TIMEWARP

106 Italian Sci-Fi

We give you the rundown on Italy's overlooked science fiction blockbusters.

118 The Toxic Avenger

Reminisce about the unlikeliest of heroes.

And... More Old Classics

Revisit Jim Henson's *The Storyteller* and *The Descent*.





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20 BATMAN V SUPERMAN

THE FIRST WORD ON DC'S SUPERHERO SMACKDOWN

MEET THE TEAM

Q. Which DC superhero needs their own solo film?



James Hoare
Editor in Chief
A. Animal Man
Could prove that Marvel doesn't have a monopoly on self-awareness.



Steve Wright
Deputy Editor
A. Mr Terrific
Just the name alone means he deserves his time to shine.



Jonathan Hatfull
Features Editor
A. Death
Yes, a movie is happening, but where's The High Cost Of Living?



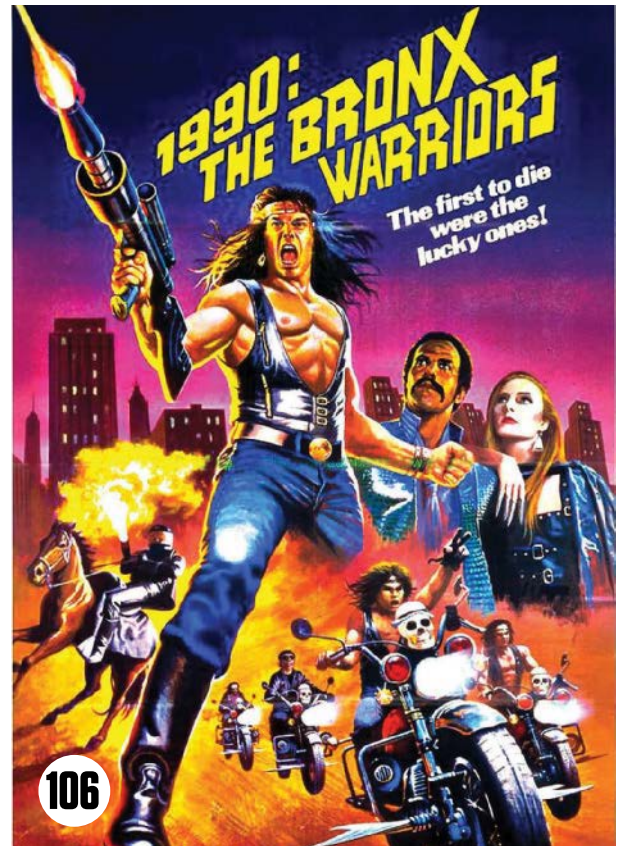
Poppy-Jay Palmer
Senior Staff Writer
A. Barbara Gordon
But she slays the Joker and then steals his wallet.



Marcus Faint
Art Editor
A. Robin
Let's finally make Robin cool! Origin story at the circus anyone?



Jen Neal
Production Editor
A. Felicity Smoak
She was added to the comics for a reason. Badass hacker genius.



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PORTAL

Your essential, trustworthy and unrivalled guide to the latest genre happenings

“THE WORLD HAS COME TOGETHER AGAINST A COMMON ENEMY”
ROLAND EMMERICH

Both Brent Spiner and Jeff Goldblum return for the long-awaited sequel.

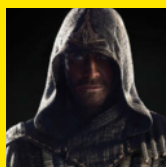


The Hunger Games'
Liam Hemsworth stars
as pilot Jake Morrison.





Julian McMahon reveals all on Syfy's exciting new series



Jeremy Irons drops a bombshell on the videogame adaptation



How JJ Abrams' created the sequel under everyone's noses



The lowdown on the sequel to Marvel's epic crossover

INDEPENDENCE DAY 2 "IS A WORTHY SEQUEL"

Screenwriter Dean Devlin tells us what to expect from the sequel to the alien-invasion epic

WORDS OLIVER PFEIFFER

In 1996, Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* became a global phenomenon. Blowing the White House to smithereens and leaving the rest of the world in ruin, it was the ultimate sci-fi disaster flick, instantly drumming home the totalitarian attitude of its antagonistic space-invader threat.

Sequel *Independence Day: Resurgence* will serve as an alien origin film as we learn more about what makes these extraterrestrials tick when they stage a retaliation after supposedly being completely annihilated two decades ago.

"The first movie was our first impression, and what we were able to deduce from what we studied. In this movie we now fill in the blanks, and it becomes a much larger canvas," scribe-turned-producer Dean Devlin tells us.

He reveals that the sequel will be an expansion. "It can't be a complete throwback. We really wanted it to feel like an organic sequel," he explains. "We've brought a lot of the old characters back, and there's a lot of fun to be had with them. Then there's a whole new group of characters who are going to take the reins and move forward."

Returning are Jeff Goldblum as plucky environmentalist David Levinson, Judd Hirsch as his verbose father, Bill Pullman as damaged former fighter-pilot/president Whitmore, Vivica A Fox as Jasmine – the now widowed wife of Steven Hiller (Will Smith) – and Brent Spiner as eccentric, seemingly back-from-the-dead scientist Dr Brakish Okun.

The new batch of characters banding together to overcome the latest threat include Liam Hemsworth (*The Hunger Games*) as US pilot Jake Morrison, whose parents were a casualty of the events of the original film; *It Follows*' Maika Monroe as former President Whitmore's now grown-up daughter; relative newcomer Jessie Usher as Dylan Hiller, the stepson of deceased war hero Steven Hiller, and Sela Ward (*Gone Girl*) as the first female president of the United States.

So why has fearless pilot Steven Hiller been killed off in between films? "In the first draft we wrote [he] was one of the characters, and when Will Smith said he didn't want to be in the sequel we had to do a pretty major rewrite of it," he reveals regarding the role that helped launch Smith's film career. "We actually found that was a benefit. He's such a giant movie star now that even if you put him in an ensemble [it] still feels like he's the lead, so by not having the character we kind of recaptured the ensemble feel."

Devlin is also quick to dismiss rumours that Smith was unable to participate due to a scheduling clash with *Suicide Squad*. "No, definitely not. He didn't want to do it," he elaborates. "He's done a few sequels to some of his films. I think he wanted to take his career in another direction."

If the overly patriotic attitude to saving the world was a little hard to take back in 1996, it looks like *Resurgence* will take an all-nations-fighting-as-one approach. "Borders are no longer relevant



The film is set 20 years later, which shows in the amazing tech.

in the same way," explained Goldblum during the *Resurgence* press conference last year. "It's my job to lead the way in making sure everyone is safe."

Devlin told us this was always the intention. "To start with, there's this idea that *Independence Day* is so related with an American holiday, but now it's all humanity related against a common enemy. So we wanted that sense of patriotism to go beyond borders and [be] patriotism for humanity."

"We call it in the film 'the War of '96,'" said returning director Roland Emmerich. "It's like a post-world generation that's unified, and that's amazing to see a world come together with a common enemy. That's a resurgence."

During footage shown at a convention in Australia, an older, wearier Levinson boards a spacecraft with Hemsworth's Morrison – flying off into the stars presumably to the rumoured new space-defence base set up on the Moon. This certainly tallies with the revelation in the trailer that they have used the aliens' technology to strengthen the planet.

So why has it taken 20 years for a sequel? "For years, I didn't want to do a sequel," Devlin admits. "Not long after 9/11 I'd written a sequel that we never handed in because I didn't feel it was worthy. I'm really pleased that we've been able to do one that is a worthy successor. I'm really proud of this movie."

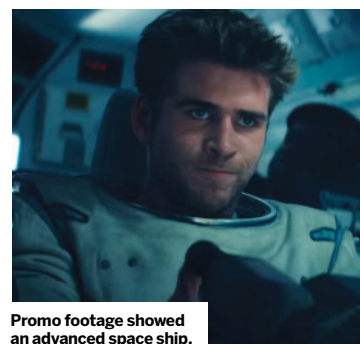
Independence Day: Resurgence will be released in cinemas on 24 June 2016.



Bill Pullman and Vivica A Fox are also returning.



Destruction is 100 per cent guaranteed in the sequel.



Promo footage showed an advanced space ship.

WHERE'S WALLY?

We chat with the future Kid Flash, Keiynan Lonsdale about what's in store...

WORDS ADAM TANSWELL

How would you describe your version of Wally West?

Wally is still learning and growing. It's hard for him to accept love at this point, and he's definitely got some attitude issues. He's defensive and afraid to trust people, but he knows how to have fun. He's got this passion for drag racing and he's very confident.

How soon will fans get to see the speeding superhero, Kid Flash?

I haven't been fitted for a costume, so I imagine it will be some time away! Every time I get a new script, there's a new development. It could be the next episode, it could be next season. I have no idea.

What research did you tackle when you landed the iconic role?

I've read the New 52 comics and I've received a bunch of old-school comics from DC, which was awesome. There's been a lot of fun homework, but the fans helped me out the most because they told me to watch the animation, *Young Justice*.

What did you learn from the cartoon version of the character?

Wally's not in that headspace right now. There's a lot going on in his life, but that comedic side to the character is always within him. As time goes on he'll show more and more of that.

How would you describe Wally's relationship with Barry Allen?

It's full of tension. Obviously, we want to see Barry and Wally running side-by-side and fighting crime. We want to see Kid

Flash look up to The Flash, but in order to get there, a friendship has to be built and a bond has to be formed.

Is Wally jealous of Barry?

Wally would never say he's jealous of Barry, but he feels like Barry got the love from Joe and Iris that he didn't get. He doesn't understand why they think Barry is so wonderful. He doesn't know Barry is The Flash. He's got a lot to find out.

Did you get feedback from fans?

The fans have been really cool, supportive and excited. I think everyone loves the show and they love the idea of seeing Kid Flash, so I feel really lucky. I'm blessed.

Has there been any negative reaction to your casting?

Wally West/Kid Flash is Caucasian with red hair – and that played on my mind. The day I first appeared on the show, I wrote a post about it. I wanted people to know that people don't love Wally because of the way he looks or because of the colour of his hair. You love him for who he is. People feel really strongly about him... so I just want to do that justice.

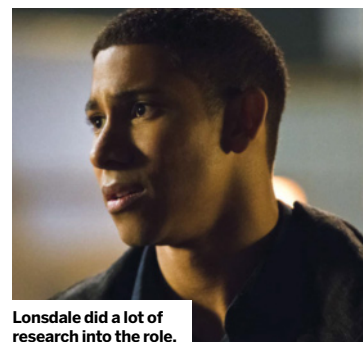
The Flash continues on Sky1 every Tuesday at 8pm.



Lonsdale says that Barry and Wally "need to learn to trust each other."



Wally has plenty to find out about Barry Allen.



Lonsdale did a lot of research into the role.



As if we couldn't be even more excited about *Twin Peaks*, the cast has expanded further, with Naomi Watts, Ashley Judd and Tom Sizemore the latest to be added.

Clearly having realised the folly of trying to compete with *Star Wars*, the release date for Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One* has been changed from 2017 to March 2018.

88

The number of Stephen King adaptations. *11.22.63*, airing from 10 April, is the 89th.



Clearly *Saw: The Final Chapter* wasn't as 'final' as it claimed to be, as an eighth film is reportedly on the way from *Piranha 3D* scribes Josh Stolberg and Pete Goldfinger.

HANDING OVER THE KEYS TO THE TARDIS

What can we learn from Doctor Who's new showrunner's time in the TARDIS?

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

And so, Steven Moffat's tenure as *Doctor Who* showrunner is coming to an end. Since his arrival, he has given us the 11th and 12th Doctors, as well as the Ponds, Clara, and a host of villains, including Michelle Gomez's glorious Missy. The new writer behind the Doctor will be *Who*-niverse veteran and *Broadchurch* creator Chris Chibnall.

We've still got a final series still to come from Moffat in 2017, but it's not unreasonable to both look ahead and back at Chibnall's work on *Doctor Who*.

KEY

				
Political	Heartbreak	Fun	Personal	Outside box

DINOSAURS ON A SPACESHIP

DON'T BE AFRAID OF FUN

This Series Seven episode came about concept-first, and it's a gloriously fun hour of *Doctor Who* that is exactly as joyful as its title suggests. There's a brilliant mish-mash of characters from around history, and David Bradley's black market-dealing bastard is a wonderfully horrible villain.



POND LIFE

DON'T FORGET THE LITTLE THINGS

We loved these little slice-of-life webisodes that took snapshots of the Ponds' life outside of the TARDIS. They were funny and sweet, and gave us the immortal line "Ood on the loo."



BM – Before Moffat



THE HUNGRY EARTH/COLD BLOOD

GET POLITICAL

This Silurian two-parter was the first time Chibnall wrote for the 11th Doctor, and it's a great throwback to the politically loaded episodes of the Pertwee era, as the Doctor rages against the two species' inability to trust each other.

THE POWER OF THREE

IT'S ALL ABOUT CHARACTER

Chibnall's second contribution to Series Seven was a great combination of an invasion storyline and a character piece on Amy and Rory. The mysterious cubes were all well and good, but it was great to see how the Doctor had affected the lives of his companions, and we just love Brian Williams.



PS

MAKE US CRY

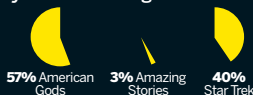
Just in case the Ponds' departure in 'The Angels Take Manhattan' wasn't enough, Chibnall wrote this scene in which Brian gets a letter from Rory explaining why he won't come back. It was never filmed, but Arthur Darvill's voice performance over the animation is superb. Sniff.

AM – After Moffat

In one of the first pieces of sequel/remake news people are actually pleased about, Shane Black is directing a new *Predator* film, inventively named *The Predator*.



Which **Bryan Fuller** series are you most looking forward to?



Speaking of *American Gods*, Fuller's adaptation of Neil Gaiman's fantasy epic has found a leading man. Enter Ricky Whittle, most recently seen in *The 100*.



Having been announced and seemingly forgotten about, a new *Battlestar Galactica* movie has been all but confirmed, thanks to the hiring of actual producers.

FIVE THINGS WITH JULIAN MCMAHON

The actor on what to expect from Syfy's new thriller, *Hunters*

WORDS ADAM TANSWELL

1 Novel inspirations

Julian McMahon plays an ever-changing villain in Syfy's *Hunters*, and it's a role that the actor is excited to talk about. "*Hunters* is a show inspired by Whitley Strieber's best-selling novel, *Alien Hunter*," he explains. "We've got a fantastic pedigree behind the series. Gale Anne Hurd is an executive producer, and I've been a huge fan of hers for a long, long time – for obvious reasons. *The Walking Dead* is a great show! Natalie Chaidez is our showrunner. She's the genius behind the television series *12 Monkeys*, and she worked closely with Whitley during the development of the show. The characters in the show and the book are similar, but the structure and the delivery is very different. I'm a huge sci-fi fan, and I think it's a great story."

2 Total annihilation

Wolf Creek star Nathan Phillips and *American Horror Story* actress Britne Oldford join McMahon on *Hunters*. "We shot 13 episodes in Australia over a period of six months, but it's very difficult to explain what the show is about," McMahon admits. "We start our show on D-Day, when a terrorist organisation goes into action – but let's transpose aliens for terrorists. They've been sitting in sleeper cells for the last 15 to 20 years, waiting for the right moment to take over the planet for two different reasons. The first reason is to get back to their own planet, and the other reason is to annihilate humanity."

3 Under the skin

McMahon is no newcomer to the sci-fi genre, having played Doctor Doom in two *Fantastic Four* films, as well as Cole Turner in *Charmed*. "I play a character called McCarthy," he reveals. "McCarthy is pretty much the main alien in the story. He thinks of himself as the boss, but he's not... He goes into action to make a point; to destroy and destruct. All of our aliens appear to be in a human form – but underneath, they are oddly structured creatures. What they've done is found out how to manipulate the human cell and lather themselves in skin. We also see McCarthy's need to continue this facade that he wears. He calls it a 'meat sack'. We went through a whole slew of different looks with hair, make-up and prosthetics. There's a bunch of looks that didn't even make it into the show."

4 Lights, camera, action

In the show, the disappearance of an FBI agent's wife leads him to a secret government unit assembled to hunt a group of ruthless alien terrorists. "I'm not sure how much I'm allowed to give away about the plot, but there's a lot of fighting, and I even get tortured in the story," admits McMahon. "I know a lot of actors like to do their own stunts. That's cool. But when it comes to action scenes, I usually try to find a good stunt guy to help me out, because that's what they do. For me, these guys train every day, and they're very good at action scenes, so why not let them take over? I like working together with a stunt guy to create a character that looks seamless when you see him on screen. That works well for everyone."

5 Pushing boundaries

McMahon reserves high praise for the show. "*Hunters* is really well written, and it's really well shot," he explains. "I think the show really pushes boundaries. It's poignant, it's incredibly current, and it's very character-driven. You're going to see an environment and a world that you've never seen before. You're also going to see aliens in a way that you've never seen them before. It's a piece that you can really invest in because the characters are so interesting. They are characters that will appeal to everybody, and they are characters that you will watch and think, 'What are they going to do next?'"

Hunters premieres on Syfy in the USA on 11 April, with a UK air date to follow.



DARK DAYS AHEAD

Joseph Mallozzi on Dark Matter's action-driven second season

WORDS MICHAEL SIMPSON

Season One of *Dark Matter* saw members of the crew of the Raza splitting their time between uncovering the truth about the crimes they're accused of and trying to avoid the enemies they've made as a result. According to showrunner Joseph Mallozzi, however, in the Syfy show's upcoming second season they will be taking matters into their own hands. "We'll still be discovering aspects of their past, but now the characters will be taking the fight out and being a little more proactive."

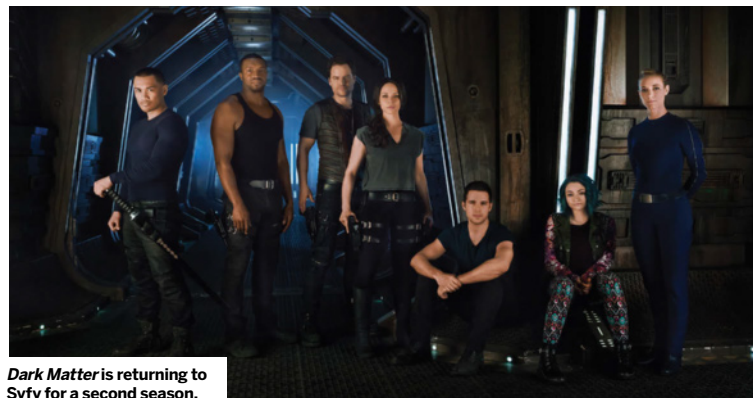
Loose ends will also be tied up, including the mystery surrounding a keycard that Five (Jodelle Ferland) stole in Season One. Mallozzi's fellow *Stargate* alumni – Torri Higginson and David Hewlett – will be back too. Yet, the second season won't just be retreading old ground; there will be new weapons, more space battles and an "incredible" prison set, Mallozzi promises.

"The great thing about the prison setting is that it allows us to introduce a lot of interesting and colourful characters. One is Nyx, played by Melanie Liburd. She has a lot of pull in the prison, a lot of connections. There is also the character

of Devon, who is a medic that will come in handy on board the ship. And there is Arax Nero, who's a prison boss and another guy with connections."

Whether these new characters will be friends or more antagonists remains to be seen. With so many criminals around in Season Two though, crew members of the Raza who are wanted by the authorities will find it harder than ever to shake off their own chequered histories. "This season, like Season One, will be full of twists and turns, shocks and surprises," says Mallozzi. "But I'd say there will be darker moments, too. I think Season Two will put the 'Dark' in Dark Matter."

Season Two of *Dark Matter* is expected to air on Syfy later this year.



Dark Matter is returning to Syfy for a second season.



MEMORY BANK

Welcome to our brand new regular Portal titbit, Memory Bank! Join us as we step back in time, flick through old issues from the SciFiNow archives and cringe at the predictions we got well and truly wrong.

We're starting off with issue 51, which went on sale five years ago and sported a lovely minimalist *Smallville* cover. Remember *Smallville*? The final season was on the horizon, and we were actually kind of sad about it. At least we now have Netflix to binge all ten season whenever and whenever we want. What a way we've come.

Rather embarrassingly, we predicted *Supernatural* would wrap itself up not too long after *Smallville*'s finale. How wrong we were. We predicted it would end soon again in 2014, so we guess we'll all just laugh about how wrong we were a second time in another five years time when Season 16 premieres on the newly launched The CW 2.0.

In the same month, we also spoke to everyone's favourite quantum leaper, Scott Bakula. He told us of captaining the Enterprise, people hating on Season Three and becoming part of *Star Trek*'s legacy. We've since read that Bakula felt he didn't spend enough time with his family while working on *Quantum Leap*, so he made sure his *Enterprise* contract included wrapping filming by 6pm every Wednesday. What a lovely man.

The quote of the issue goes to Nick Frost while promoting his and Simon Pegg's sci-fi romp *Paul*, which he described as "essentially *Little Miss Sunshine*, but with an alien instead of Alan Arkin." Amazing.



ASSASSIN'S CREED UNCOVERED

Jeremy Irons on why the latest videogame adap will appeal to all

WORDS ADAM TANSWELL

Thus far, the creators of the *Assassin's Creed* movie are

keeping their secrets well. Aside from the main cast members and something vague about going back in time, it's hard to tell how faithful Justin Kurzel's adaptation will play to its videogame source material. If we are to take the word of Jeremy Irons (*High-Rise*) – who

plays lead antagonist Alan Rikkin – for gospel, it will at the very least pay lip service in the form of the title.

"The movie has the same name [as the videogame]... I think it might be called *Time Out Of Mind* actually, not *Assassin's Creed*. I don't know how similar it is to the movie."

Previous videogame transfers have suffered from being thinly veiled retreads. *Assassin's Creed*, however, is clearly a different kettle of fish. With a cast including Michael

Fassbender, Marion Cotillard, Michael K Williams and Brendan Gleeson, Irons is confident that it will appeal to everyone.

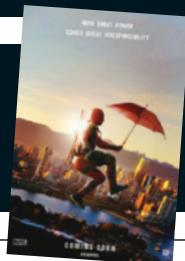
"I think the *Assassin's Creed* aficionados will go and see it, but I think a lot of other people will go and see it too. From what I've seen, it'll stand up well as a movie and possibly there'll be more."

Assassin's Creed will be released in cinemas on 26 December.



\$300m

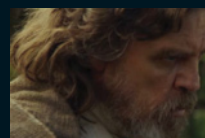
Deadpool's record-breaking worldwide gross for an R-rated film



Season Three of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* continues to excite, with Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Bryce Dallas Howard, Alice Eve and Mackenzie Davis all on board.

Which of the new *Star Wars* Episode VIII characters are you most excited about?

51% Benicio Del Toro 43% Laura Dern 6% Kelly Marie Tran



The *Power Rangers* movie has found the perfect villain: none other than Elizabeth Banks will play Rita Repulsa. She'll show those pesky Rangers a thing or two...

REBEL DAWN

A look at what's ahead for the *Star Wars* animated series WORDS STEVE WRIGHT

Despite inevitably being overshadowed by its big-screen brethren, *Star Wars: Rebels* has quietly but confidently gone about its business, building on its strong first season. Judging by the mid-season trailer, the show will continue to pile on the drama for the galaxy's finest freedom fighters...



1 Jedi/Sith Temple

At first glance this looks like a Jedi temple that Kanan, Ezra and Ahsoka have stumbled on, but the red tinge... smells of Sith to us.



2 Master and apprentices

Darth Vader meets his two Inquisitors. Judging by their repeated failures, we doubt he's too pleased with them.



3 Round two

Jedi and Inquisitors face off – including among their number a new foe alongside the Fifth Brother and Seventh Sister.



4 Inquisitors do battle

The Inquisitors face off against what look like the Jedi Temple sentries. It would appear that some of them survived their *Clone Wars* run in.



5 Ezra, meet Yoda

"Growing, your abilities are. And with them... danger." Ezra communes with Yoda, this time face to face. Or is it another dream sequence?



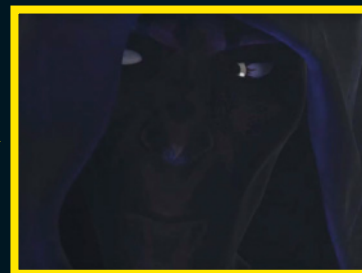
6 Remembering Anakin

"He's amazing." Ezra and Ahsoka watch an old hologram of Anakin Skywalker in action. Oh, if only he knew...



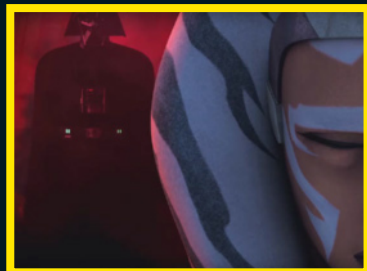
7 Guard of honour

We get a better look at the Jedi Temple guard thanks to Kanan. But where exactly are they? And what is the symbol at the top?



8 An old foe returns?

Is that Darth Maul? Last seen fleeing the Emperor in the *Son Of Dathomir* comic, it looks like the fallen Sith apprentice might be back.



9 Looking back

"Ahsoka... why did you leave?" The former Jedi padawan is tormented by the knowledge of her master's fate and her own guilt.



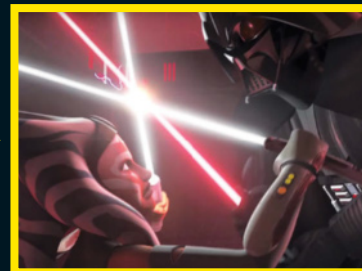
10 Making an entrance

Ezra's powers are growing. Unfortunately, this attracts more trouble in the form of Vader, here seen making his entrance in style.



11 Ezra awakens

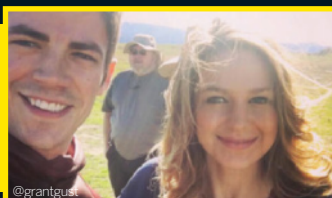
Is that a more Jedi-friendly version of Kylo Ren's lightsaber we see? Looks like *Rebels* might have more than a few nods to *Episode VII*.



12 Ahsoka vs Vader

Master and apprentice finally meet as Vader and Ahsoka face off. We've been waiting for this since the end of *Clone Wars*. It will be epic.

Love *The Flash*? Love *Supergirl*? You're in luck, as the two will be appearing together in a unique crossover episode. You're welcome.

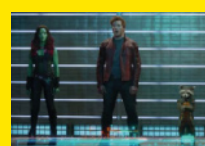


@grantgustin

173

The amount of awards *Game Of Thrones* has won to date.

Kurt Russell's presence in *Guardians Of The Galaxy: Volume 2* has been confirmed. The smart money is on him playing Star-Lord's dad.



Fans of *The Magicians* rejoice – a second series of the adaptation of Lev Grossman's hit novel is definitely happening. Still no UK air date, though.

**IT'S
NOT AN
X-MEN SPINOFF**

Legion will occur in its own universe, as FX head John Landgraf explained at the TCAs. "*Legion* takes place in a parallel universe, if you will, where the government is aware mutants exist, but the public is not."

**DAN
STEVENS IS
LEGION**

The *Guest* star is playing David Haller, aka Legion, who discovers that the visions he's been seeing might not be the product of his schizophrenia. In the comics, he can bend reality, travel in time... oh, and he's Professor X's son.

6 THINGS WE KNOW ABOUT LEGION

Breaking down the X-Men TV series

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

**IT'S
GOT THE BEST
SHOWRUNNER**

Noah Hawley's work on *Fargo* was superb, and FX obviously agreed. With regards genre cred, it's worth remembering that he's reported to be working on one of the Universal monster movie reboots.



**THE
SUPPORTING
CAST IS BRILLIANT**

Stevens has been joined by *Fargo* co-stars Rachel Keller and Jean Smart, and the awesome Aubrey Plaza. The *Parks And Recs* star will play David's friend Lenny, an addict and optimist on the verge of turning her life around.



© Dominic D

**IT'S
ALREADY
A HIT**

It's only at the pilot stage, but it's already loved. Veteran *X-Men* writer Simon Kinberg told *Collider* that there is "an intent to do something completely original... and almost do our *Breaking Bad* of superhero stories."



© David Shankbone

**IT'S
JUST THE
BEGINNING**

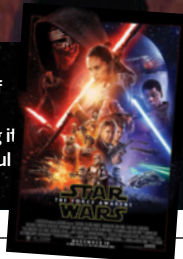
Hellfire is still ticking away at Fox, but hit a setback when the creative team departed to join the 24 reboot. We don't know how it will tie in with *Legion*, but it's full steam ahead for the latter, which is aiming at a 2016 air date.



Legion will air later in 2016.

\$2,028,660,978

The worldwide gross of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* to date, making it the third most successful film of all time.



Syfy's new female-fronted *Van Helsing* TV series has a leading lady in the form of former *True Blood* star Kelly Overton, who will play the title role of Vanessa Van Helsing.

Visit the SciFiNow magazine YouTube channel for the all the latest film reviews. This month, Poppy tells you everything you need to know about *Deadpool*!



Well, *Alien: Covenant* won't be boring, as *This Is The End* star Danny McBride will join Michael Fassbender, Demian Bichir and Katherine Waterston on the *Prometheus* sequel.

BEST OF THE BILLBOARDS

Celebrating the best, worst and weirdest movie posters out there

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL



HIGH-RISE

One of an absolutely gorgeous set of designs for Ben Wheatley's take on JG Ballard's dystopian nightmare, this *High-Rise* one-sheet is stunning. Not only does it neatly capture the time period, it beautifully conveys the sense of there being something terribly wrong just out of view. You know, because of the fella falling to his death.



MONSTER HUNT

Our eyes didn't know what to make of the posters for Chinese box-office smash *Monster Hunt*. There's a wealth of character posters showing what we assume is every single talking cast member, and they all feature variations on this cheery little monster, who's weirdly reminiscent of the Adipose from that *Doctor Who* episode in Series Four. It might be genius.



THE DIVERGENT SERIES: ALLEGIANT

We appreciate that this is a film about a society that forces its citizens to conform, but if you're going to do character posters, shouldn't they have a little more... character? These movies are repeat offenders when it comes to dull posters, and they need to sort it out. Honestly, they aren't inspiring us to go and see it. At all.



10 CLOVERFIELD LANE

Courtesy of an excellent surprise teaser trailer and this ace teaser poster, we know what JJ Abrams has been up to. And what about that tagline, eh?



THE VALLEY OF THE SASQUATCH

We will admit to not knowing too much about John Portanova's low-budget horror *The Valley Of The Sasquatch*. Based on this alone, we're watching it.



WHO GOES THERE?

Why fans of classic British sci-fi need to watch *Cops And Monsters*

WORDS STEVE WRIGHT

Of all the things to thank Kickstarter for, we can now add supernatural web drama *Cops And Monsters* to the list. Having recently surpassed the target for the series' fourth episode, creator Fraser Coull is looking ahead to a fifth – and judging by the synopsis, this is something you'll want to see.

"*Cops And Monsters* delves into a near-future Scotland, where the Paranormal Investigation Team Scotland (PITS) work the cases from the supernatural community," Coull tells us. "Our show follows the Glasgow division as Commander Norris Fletcher (Simon Weir) polices the vampires, werewolves and zombies with his team made up of newcomer Maya Hedges (Ellen Patterson), who is seeking answers for why her parents were murdered randomly by a pack of werewolves, and hacker with a heart Martin Carmichael (Kenny Boyle)."

Furthering its geek credentials are the treasure trove of genre stars who are showing up. Sophie Aldred (*Doctor Who*) is appearing in the fourth episode, and fellow *Who* alumni Caitlin Blackwood and Sarah Louise Madison are on board. Aldred is enthusiastic about being involved, "I just think it's so brilliant that the democratic process of Kickstarter projects means that talented people can make the stuff they really want to do and the people who want to see/hear it can be involved too."

Watch *Cops And Monsters* at copsandmonsters.co.uk.

10 CLOVERFIELD LANE

How JJ Abrams created the ultimate sequel

WORDS STEVE WRIGHT

Just when we were beginning to think that we'd never see a sequel to *Cloverfield*, it turns out that one has already been made.

Described by JJ Abrams as a "blood relative" to the original, *10 Cloverfield Lane* sees three people (played by Mary Elizabeth Winstead, John Goodman and John Gallagher Jr) living in a bunker of sorts – but why are they there?

With first-time director Dan Trachtenberg taking over from Matt Reeves, we can expect a new approach in the sequel. More than anything else, however, we have to admire just how they kept it under wraps for so long. In case you were wondering, here's how they managed it:



Turns out the *Cloverfield* sequel was right under our noses all along.

JJ's big sequel plan



Pretend to be making a different film

Back in 2012, Paramount bought the script for 'The Cellar', a story about a couple hiding in a bunker in a post-apocalyptic Earth, having been on 2012's 'Hit List' of unpublished screenplays.



Let the cast talk about the project

Rather than raise suspicion by keeping everything hush-hush, the cast were allowed to talk about 'Valencia', with Winstead describing it as "a really contained film."

'Valencia'

Give it a fake name

Considering it was being produced by Bad Robot, some might have suspected that a *Cloverfield* sequel was being made. To deflect attention, it was given the name 'Valencia'.

How to keep it under wraps

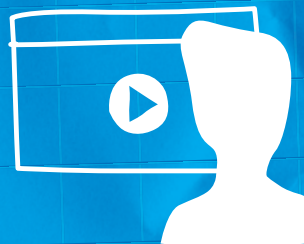
Cause an almighty distraction

For the last couple of years, no one has been asking JJ Abrams about *Cloverfield 2*, since they were too busy trying to uncover the secrets of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Quite a good red herring, that.

STAR WARS

Hire an all-new cast

No returning names were confirmed; instead, John Goodman, Mary Elizabeth Winstead and John Gallagher Jr were all signed up to the project.



Suddenly release the trailer

The first teaser was attached to Michael Bay's explosion extravaganza *13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers Of Benghazi*, with the title *10 Cloverfield Lane* only being disclosed at the very end. Cue the shortest wait for a movie ever...

10 Cloverfield Lane will be released in cinemas on 11 March 2016.



Civil War II will see Iron Man face off against Captain Marvel ahead of her 2019 film.



CIVIL WAR: ROUND 2

The lowdown on Marvel's game-changing sequel to its successful crossover series

WORDS CHRIS ANDERSON

It looks like Marvel's finest won't only be scrapping on the big screen in *Captain America: Civil War*, as Iron Man is set to take on Captain Marvel in the blockbuster comic-book sequel *Civil War II*, with a battle that ends badly for some Marvel heroes.

The original series was published ten years ago, written by Mark Millar with art

from Steve McNiven. It remains one of the company's top sellers in a collected format, pitting Iron Man against Captain America on their opposing views of the Superhuman Registration Act, with other heroes picking a side. The story inspired Anthony and Joe Russo's *Captain America: Civil War*, out this summer, which is when *Civil War II* hits stores.

The sequel will be created by *All-New X-Men* duo Brian Michael Bendis and David Marquez, this time seeing Iron Man facing off against Captain Marvel. The plot involves the emergence of a new superhuman character that can predict future catastrophes in true *'Minority Report'* style. Marvel, aka Carol Danvers, believes these abilities should be utilised, with supervillains locked up and dealt with before carrying out their plans; Tony Stark disagrees, saying that the punishment should never precede the crime. The argument divides the Marvel universe.

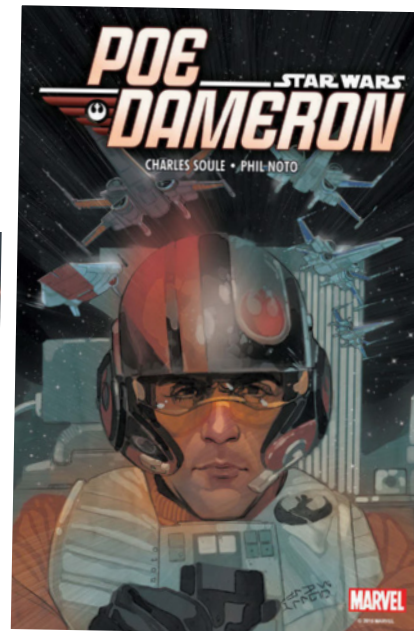
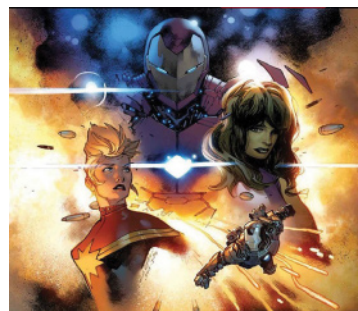
But the stakes are raised when the new character announces that something terrible will happen because of one of the heroes, prompting another to take matters into their own hands and murder them.

According to *New York Daily News*, who sat in on the *Civil War II* brainstorming session at the company's last editorial retreat, when Bendis and Marvel editor-in-chief Axel Alonso announced which character was to die and who would be doing the deed, it was met with a loud ovation. "That's like an epic," said writer James Robinson afterwards. "I'm genuinely shocked."

Alonso also told *The Washington Post* why Captain Marvel was the protagonist, in addition to raising her profile ahead of her own movie in 2019. "It not only speaks to her character, but her new role in the Marvel universe," he explained. "She's the leader of Alpha Flight, which is Earth's first line of defence from all incursions... she is a very powerful, authoritative figure."

This is all Marvel is saying for now, but more will be revealed in *Civil War II* #0, written by Bendis with art by Olivier Coipel, in May. That same month also sees the release of a *Civil War II* special on Free Comic Book Day, while the series kicks off properly in June.

Civil War II #0 will be released in May.



POE DAMERON AWAKENS

The greatest pilot in the galaxy gets his own comic

WORDS CHRIS ANDERSON

Some of the burning questions left by *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* could be answered in the new ongoing *Poe Dameron* series from Marvel. Until now, and since regaining the licence from Dark Horse, Marvel's *Star Wars* line has generally avoided the period after *Return Of The Jedi* – the *Shattered Empire* miniseries and *C-3PO* one-shot being the notable exceptions.

With the new title, set just before the events of *Episode VII*, readers can learn more about Dameron and his trusty droid, BB-8, as they embark on missions for General Leia Organa as part of the Resistance's X-wing squadron – all with the ultimate goal of finding clues to Luke's whereabouts. The First Order will never be far behind, including a new character within its ranks described as Dameron's personal nemesis.

Charles Soule, who worked on the *Lando* and *Obi-Wan & Anakin* miniseries, will handle the writing, while Phil Noto, who drew the *Chewbacca* comic, provides the art. While it may not be featuring Finn or Rey, Soule told *USA Today* that the *Poe Dameron* series will "explore locations new and old in the *Star Wars* galaxy... while also bringing depth and expanding the world of *The Force Awakens*."

Star Wars: Poe Dameron #1 will be available to buy from 6 April.



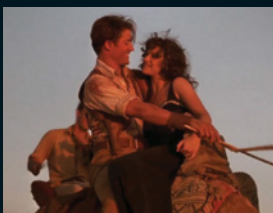
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MAJOR MOTOKO KUSANAGI (GHOST IN THE SHELL)

COSPLAYER: CAULDRON OF MISCHIEF FROM: YORKSHIRE, UNITED KINGDOM TWITTER: @CAULDRONOFCAKE FACEBOOK: /CAULDRONOFMISCHIEFCOSPLAY

1 THE CHARACTER

I've been a fan of *Ghost In The Shell* ever since I watched the movie in my very early teens, so from there I explored the other series. Major Motoko Kusanagi is one of my favorite characters. She's a cyborg and even though her personality differs depending on the different series, for the most part she's a very strong, no-nonsense character, and has a very commanding presence. I also very much like her design.

2 THE COSTUME

The under-suit was the hardest part. I used a four-way stretch vinyl fabric with a slight sheen to it in a very pale lavender colour. I had to buy it from a Korean online store. I made a custom pattern and made a test costume using scrap fabric to see where adjustments were needed. Once the pattern was down correctly, sewing it was fairly straightforward. The socks were also made of the same fabric.

3 THE DESIGN

The under-suit she has is quite fitted, and in order to get that look I needed to create the custom pattern from my body, and I did this by using the 'duct tape dummy' method – wrapping my body in layers of cling film and duct tape, drawing out the pattern and then cutting it out. This allowed me to sew the costume to fit me correctly without having any loose areas, and I was able to see and adjust how the suit would look on me.

4 THE ACCESSORIES

She has two metallic shin guards and a belt. I made the shin guards from EVA foam and Worbla, a thermoplastic that becomes moldable when heated. I cut and shaped the foam first, then covered them with Worbla and carved any additional details before molding it to my leg shape and adding straps. The belt was made by covering a piece of foam in the suit fabric, and the buckle was again foam, Worbla and painted to match.

DAYS
OF FUTURE NOW

Here are some upcoming UK conventions that you can't afford to miss...

Medway Comic and Screen Festival
19 March
Medway Park, Kent
MCSF.co.uk
Adults £10, children £6

The Medway festival brings together comics and all things big and small screen for a day of Kent-based geekery.

MCM Birmingham
19-20 March
NEC, Birmingham
MCMComicCon.com
Adults £11-30, children
go free*

This year guests include *Bionic Woman*'s Lindsay Wagner, *Lost Girl*'s Paul Amos and *Red Dwarf*'s Robert Llewellyn.

Edinburgh Comic Con
2-3 April
EICC, Edinburgh
HeroConventions.com
Adults £11-27.50, children
go free*

The action-packed weekend caters to fans of *Star Wars*, *Game Of Thrones*, *2000AD*, *Electric Man* and more.

Sci-Fi Scarborough
9-10 April
The Spa Complex
SciFiScarborough.co.uk
Adults £16.50 – £27.50,
children £0* – £5.50

Scarborough's self-confessed 'unconventional convention' offers retro gaming, geek pub quizzes and a party night.

*conditions apply

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COVER FEATURE

Batman V Superman

BATMAN



BATMAN V SUPERMAN
Fight Of The Century

THE COUNTDOWN TO CINEMA'S ULTIMATE
SUPERHERO SCRIMMAGE IS ALMOST
OVER, BUT THE DC CINEMATIC UNIVERSE
IS ONLY JUST GETTING STARTED. WE TALK
TO PRODUCERS **CHARLES ROVEN** AND
DEBORAH SNYDER ABOUT **BATMAN V
SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE**, **WONDER
WOMAN**, **JUSTICE LEAGUE** AND MORE...

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

SUPERMAN

FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

COVER FEATURE

Batman V Superman

IF A CINEMATIC GRUDGE MATCH BETWEEN BATMAN AND SUPERMAN, THE TWO BIGGEST COMIC-BOOK CHARACTERS IN EXISTENCE, HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED A COUPLE OF DECADES ago, back when superheroes still wore their underpants over their leotards, everyone would have lost their shit. Now, however, it's more difficult to provoke that kind of reaction. The game has been upped since then, but the audience is more cynical, and it's considerably harder not only to impress, but to get people excited at all.

Marvel's *Avengers Assemble* became the benchmark for superhero team-ups in 2012 when it brought together six of Earth's Mightiest Heroes for an epic battle through New York City. To make an impact, you have to be on that level. Up to this point, DC movies have stayed within the lines of the tried-and-tested formula: one good guy fights a couple of bad guys. *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* is shaking things up. Now, we have two good guys fighting each other, with a couple of bad guys standing on the sidelines, egging them on. This isn't a superhero team-up; it's a superhero smack down, and presumably there can only be one winner.

As a direct sequel to *Man Of Steel*, *Batman V Superman* is set to take place about a year after the Black Zero Event, when the Kryptonians came down to Earth. "We're kind of seeing that although he has good intentions, sometimes when Superman intervenes there are consequences he doesn't expect," says producer Deborah Snyder. "I think that's a really interesting thing to talk about. What if there was this alien, this god from another planet with these amazing superpowers? Would you want him to intervene? Under what jurisdiction is he? I guess he lives in the US, so he falls under their jurisdiction. Do they want to use him as a weapon? What is he supposed to do in his role? Who is he supposed to save? I think when some

In *Batman V Superman*, the world is torn on whether Kal-El is a hero.

of the consequences he doesn't expect happen, he begins to question his role and his place in the world.

"[*Batman V Superman*] still puts our characters into a real-world scenario, and that's what is interesting to me. I think it's about seeing these characters with these superpowers existing in our world, and what are the implications of that and what does it mean for society? What does it mean for religion? What does it mean for national security? I think it really stirs conversation, and those are the movies that are most interesting to me personally."

It's not just Superman who has to live with the consequences of the Black Zero Event. The fallout from the battle with Zod was a lot bigger than the US could have imagined. After all the violence, the terror and the destruction of property, he's giving superheroes a bad name, and Batman's not having any of it. "I think [Batman] feels that



someone with such enormous power that could do anything he wants is a dangerous thing, because even if there's a one per cent chance that he could act against us and harm our interests, America's interests or even humanity for that matter, then he's very dangerous," Snyder tells us. "When we come to Gotham, crime has been down because he's doing such a great job and has cleaned up the city so much. I think he's maybe taken it too far. There's a fear that's kind of controlling a lot of the crime in Gotham."

As if the titular skirmish wasn't enough to get excited about, *Batman V Superman* will of course also introduce Ben Affleck's interpretation on the Caped Crusader. "Ben's take on Batman evolves from Chris Terrio's script and Zack Snyder's overseeing of it," says producer Charles Roven. "Ben just takes it to a wonderful level. He realises it in a wonderful way, which is ➤



From what we've heard, Gal Gadot's performance will be a sight to behold.



THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

Deborah Snyder on why Wonder Woman & Gal Gadot are forces to be reckoned with

What has made you most excited about working on a film of this scale?

The fact that we have Wonder Woman in the movie and that we're seeing her on the screen for the first time is such an important moment. It's such a defining moment. I believe that there needs to be more strong female roles just in general for women, especially in the action genre. She is like the pinnacle of characters. She represents so much for women.

Throughout history she's changed and evolved and really reflected the time of women's place in society, and I think now, with so much talk about gender equality, it's fitting that she's going to be gracing the screen for the first time in *Batman V Superman*, as well as having her first standalone movie that we've been shooting in London. To me, that is the most exciting thing.

What kind of bearing does Wonder Woman have on the plot of this film?

I can't tell you that! [laughs] Let's just say that it's her first introduction. The film is mostly about Batman and Superman and what their struggles are, but she does play an integral role, especially at the end of the film. I think audiences will definitely want to see more from her after seeing it. I know I do!

What is Gal like in the role?

Gal's amazing. You have so many kids that look up to these heroes – they can't necessarily distinguish between an actor playing the role. It's, 'No! *This* is Wonder Woman!' Even my kids go, 'Are you going to work with Superman and Batman today?' They've met them, but they're still Superman and Batman!

Finding the right person to play Wonder Woman was critical, because she's going to be a role model for women of all ages, and how she acts and behaves in her personal persona of who she is, and how she would react to fans, we had to take that into consideration, and Gal is just an amazing person. She's positive and energetic and sweet and hopeful, and she's an amazing mother and an amazing daughter to her mum, and she personified all those qualities that we would want in a person who is going to represent her.

She's a hard worker. She had to work out really hard because she will admit that when she came into the role she's always had more of a model-type body, and physically we wanted to make sure she was strong. She has been training so hard. Since *Batman V Superman*, it's been a constant training regime to be fit and strong and healthy. So I just couldn't be happier with Gal in this role, as is everybody.

“
ALTHOUGH HE HAS GOOD INTENTIONS, SOMETIMES WHEN SUPERMAN INTERVENES THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES HE DOESN'T EXPECT... HE BEGINS TO QUESTION HIS PLACE IN THE WORLD
”

DEBORAH SNYDER

Bruce's enmity with Superman stems from the destruction in *Man Of Steel*.





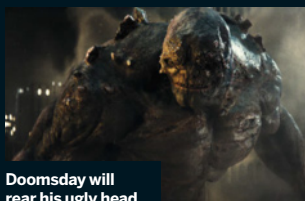
COVER FEATURE

Batman V Superman

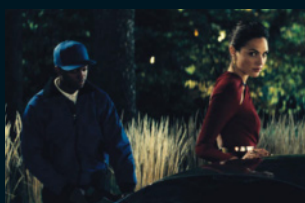
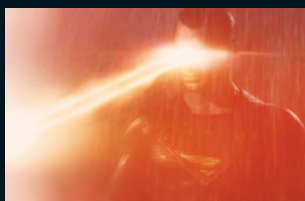
➤ the toughest, most seasoned, oldest Batman that we've seen. He's battling and he's been desensitised and he's been hardened by the experiences he's had over a number of years that he's been Batman. Is the character the Bat, or is he still Bruce Wayne?"

"I think it's a really interesting take, and a really nice juxtaposition that we have," says Snyder. "Henry [Cavill] in *Man Of Steel*, he just kind of figured out his powers and he started becoming this superhero. He's next to Ben Affleck's Batman, who has been doing this a long time. He's jaded, he's seen so many things, and obviously I think both their point of views would differ based on the experiences or lack of experiences that they have had being a superhero. I think that's a really interesting dynamic in the movie.

"It's enormously exciting for me to see this match of these two amazing superheroes. The fact that the characters have been around for over 75 years means there's a history in cross-cultural, and it seems to appeal to many different generations. To be able to bring them together in this way on the big screen for the first time, it's enormously exciting."



Doomsday will rear his ugly head.



Although *Man Of Steel* technically became the first film of the DC Extended Universe in 2013, *Batman V Superman* is going to be making more waves than its prequel ever could. It's being treated as a launch pad for the rest of the universe, one that will not only introduce us to these brand new versions of Batman and Gotham, but the world of the Justice League.

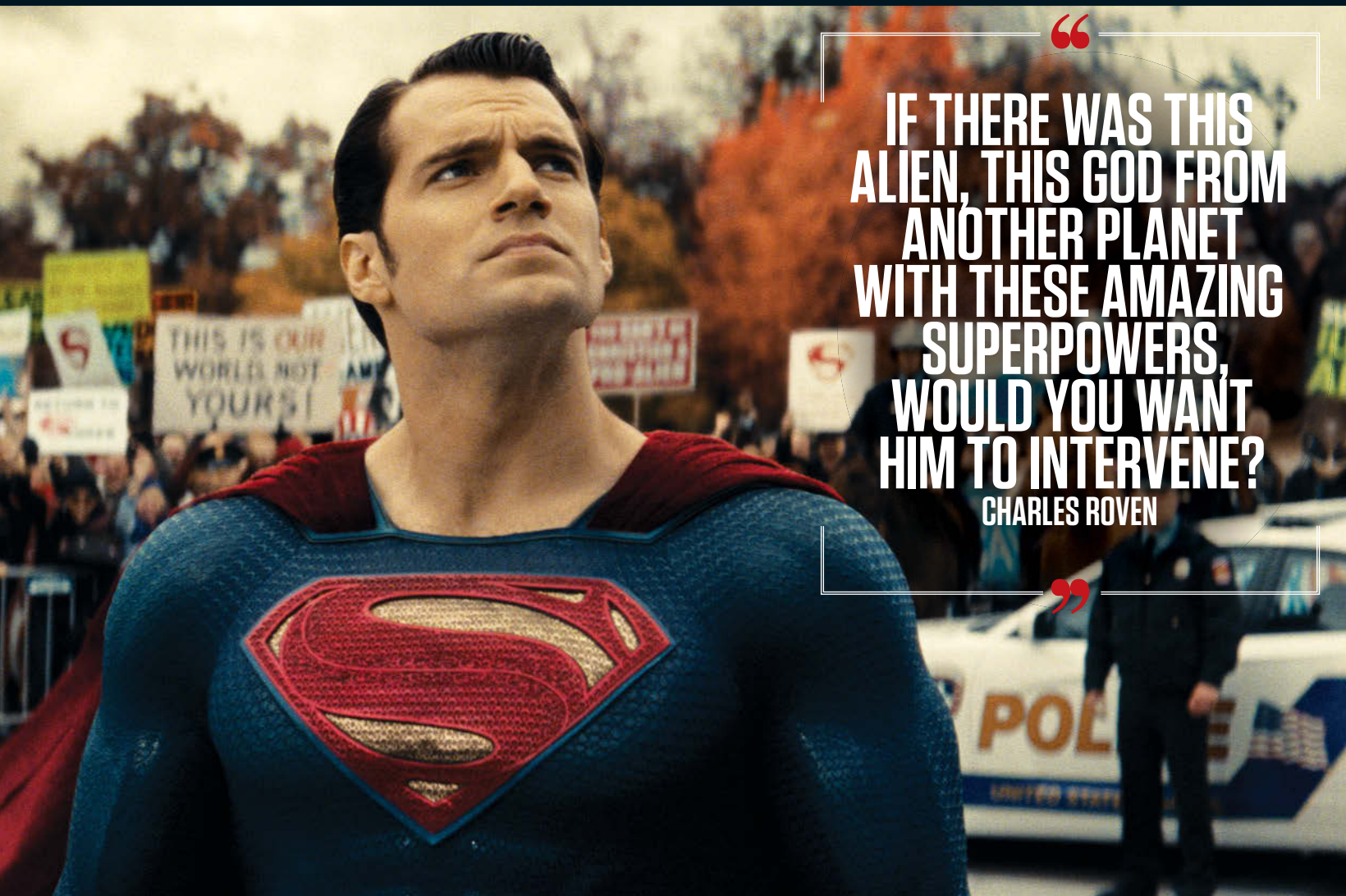
"We do different things in *Batman V Superman* than we did in *Man Of Steel*," Roven tells us. "We've taken the story, even though it's related to *Man Of Steel*, in a sensible but slightly different direction that also makes it pretty clear that it's a gateway to the *Justice League* movies and the other Justice League characters. We sort of planted that in *Man Of Steel* as well; we just didn't hint it as hard as we do in *Batman V Superman*. It's why we called [the film] what we called it: *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*.

"It continues to stand outwardly as opposed to being closed and inward, so we like that, just like *Man Of Steel* let you know, if you look at all the Easter eggs, that Lex exists even though you don't see him, and Bruce Wayne exists because there's Wayne Industries on

the satellite. We've allowed for super abilities, and we've allowed for aliens to exist because Superman is an alien. We expand on all of that in *Batman V Superman*, and also introduce you to other member of the *Justice League* universe, and we're standing out from that. We want these movies to build on each other."

As the gateway to the rest of the Justice League, it would have been very easy for *Batman V Superman* to lose its way. Huge franchises have been known to fall into the trap of focusing too much on world-building and set-up early on. But Snyder reassures us that this isn't the case this time. The film is very much an epic in its own right.

"You have to focus on the story that you're delivering and make sure it's the best movie possible," she says. "On the other hand, you're serving this larger universe, and so talk a lot about what the plan is for the future, and what is the timeline. So even when there are these single movies, they all fit into a particular timeline, they all make sense, they all work together because they're all in the same universe. You have to have a particular amount of planning, but at the same time you have to tell



“IF THERE WAS THIS ALIEN, THIS GOD FROM ANOTHER PLANET WITH THESE AMAZING SUPERPOWERS, WOULD YOU WANT HIM TO INTERVENE?”

CHARLES ROVEN



the story that you're telling in the best possible way, and service that story. It started out as another Superman film, and then Zack started thinking about what would be interesting. He said, 'You know, we've seen it in comics, but we've never seen it on the big screen, this battle between these two characters, and wouldn't that be amazing?' Then it kind of just took off from there."

THE SECOND TRAP THIS FILM COULD STUMBLE INTO WOULD BE COMPARING ITSELF TO CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S DARK KNIGHT TRILOGY. THERE, WE HAVE A SERIES that became a turning point for comic-book movies: they proved superheroes didn't have to be campy, colourful and in-your-face to make an impact. They could be cool, dramatic and artistic. After its immense success, Nolan's series would be a great benchmark for any project, but if *Batman V Superman* draws too much inspiration from it, it would end up being compared to it forever by both fans and critics alike. 'Not as good as the *Dark Knight* trilogy' is not an ideal description. Thankfully, Snyder insists that those close comparisons were not the case during production on the film.

"I think the world is so different," she says. "Christopher Nolan, who's an executive producer with [his wife Emma Thomas], and who produced *Man Of Steel*, are very good friends of ours. We love the movies that they make. I think the story is so different and our Batman is so different that everything about it just felt very different, so it wasn't a comparison when we were making it along the way. Of course, with the iconic moments you're like, 'Okay, how are we going to do the death of the parents, or how are we going to do the moment when he flies, or what are we going to do with the Batmobile?' Because you've seen what was done in the past.

"You're always striving, and Zack especially has a very strong point of view, and really makes things his own with his unique style. We weren't really comparing along the way because it was so very different. This is also the first time, you know... Chris's *Dark Knight* trilogy was a very closed universe. It was only that one particular character. There wasn't room for any other characters in the world, but the world that we created is a world where Gotham and Metropolis exist. Not only do they exist, but they are kind of across the river from each other. So I think we were really just working on the details that would make our world ➤

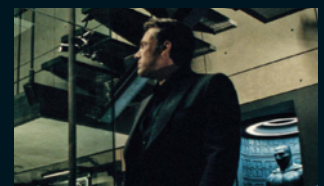


Zack Snyder behind the camera with Ben Affleck.

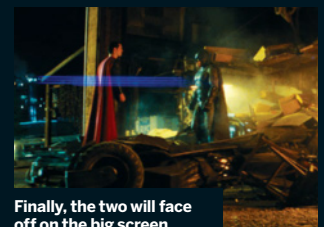


Batman V Superman's take on Batman draws closely from Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Lex Luthor (Jesse Eisenberg) with his assistant, Mercy Graves (Tao Okamoto).



This incarnation of Bruce Wayne is older and more world-weary.



Finally, the two will face off on the big screen.



**BEN IS THE TOUGHEST,
OLDEST AND MOST
SEASONED BATMAN WE'VE
SEEN. HE'S BEEN HARDENED
AND DESENSITISED BY
HIS EXPERIENCES OVER
THE YEARS**
CHARLES ROVEN

➤ make sense. Really, we didn't have to try and make comparisons."

From the audience's point of view, the comparisons with Nolan's series are inevitable, as are comparisons with what Marvel is doing now. To many, DC and Marvel seem to be in constant competition. DC announced *Wonder Woman*; Marvel decided to make a *Captain Marvel* film. Marvel brought the Avengers together for the one of the biggest movies of all time, and DC is planning an even bigger team-up with *Justice League*. Visit any comments section on the internet, and you're sure to find a DC fan slagging off Marvel followers and vice versa. It's relentless. But according to Snyder, it's a perception that only fans hold.

"I think what we're both doing is very different, but the bottom line is that [Marvel's] success and our success is good for both of us. The fact that these comic-book characters that have stood the test of time are now coming to the big screen, that's amazing. It's an amazing thing for comics. I think the more success for both of us means the better it is for comics – and for movies! We want people to go to movies."

AS WELL AS OPENING THE DOORS TO AN OLDER BATMAN, *BATMAN V SUPERMAN* IS ALSO GOING TO PRESENT US WITH BRAND NEW TAKES ON A FEW OF other iconic characters from the DC Comics universe, particularly power-mad businessman/supervillain Lex Luthor, played by Jesse Eisenberg. Lex's limited appearances in the film's trailers already stand out as unusual simply because of how young he is and because of the fact that he still has hair.

"We wanted Lex to be, you know, it's the modern world, so what is the modern businessman like?" says Snyder. "He's different than he has ever been before. He's always one step ahead. We did a scene at a party that he was hosting, and it's really interesting when you see the physicality of Ben as Bruce Wayne and the physicality of Henry, even when he's playing Clark Kent, and then there's Jesse, who's slight and wiry. But what you realise is intellectually he is far superior to either one of them. He's the puppet master controlling the whole scene. I think that's a really interesting dynamic. It's something we haven't seen before."

And then, of course, there's *Wonder Woman*, played by the brilliant Gal Gadot. It's an exciting time to be a *Wonder Woman* fan. We've only been treated to glimpses of her in a couple



of the Batman V Superman trailers, so we're still not sure how much she'll feature in the actual film. But Roven promises that however much of her we get will be worth it. "We'll get a taste, and hopefully you'll understand her head space by the time the movie is over and where she's coming from," he says. "In Wonder Woman, you'll find out how she got to be where she is. But we're excited about it."

"She's appropriately dynamic and charismatic. And she's fun to watch! Most of her interaction is with Bruce Wayne, and I think there's a really playful quality in their exchanges... I'm hoping [the fans] will be pleasantly surprised and enjoy her. We certainly do. We think she's great."

"I really am excited for the *Wonder Woman* film," enthuses Snyder. "I just think it's about time. I love the script, and I'm thrilled to have hired the first female director to bring her to the big screen. The fact that Patty Jenkins will be the first woman to direct a big studio tent-pole action film is amazing, so on so many levels that is the film I'm most proud of... We met Patty when we were doing our director search for *Wonder Woman*, and we made a conscious effort to hire a woman. We felt like it was very important. For me, I thought,

"How could I produce this movie and not hire a female director?" It was a no-brainer. Coincidentally, about seven years ago, Patty has had a passion for this character and approached Warner Bros and kind of pitched her idea, and it just didn't get off the ground. So I think for Patty, this is a dream that's been in the making for many years and I think she just turned out to be the right person in so many respects. She's doing an amazing job."

The reaction to the first few trailers for *Batman V Superman* has been phenomenal. It's very difficult to watch two of the biggest titans in superhero history brush shoulders and throw abuse at each other without having a massive grin on your face. Five minutes of action-packed footage with a dramatic soundtrack thrown over the top of it is enough to reduce even the most serious of comic-book movie fans to a state of giddy childlike glee.

Roven reveals that he's delighted with the reaction to the trailers, just as we're excited by the trailers themselves. "Some of the feedback from the fans is always surprising, because there are so many rumours coming out of what they see and how they dissect it, and it's always interesting and fun to watch different takes on it," he says.

"We love the fact that the fans really are as dedicated as they are. At the same time we don't want to acknowledge any of their questions and queries or their thoughts and things that they believe in because we don't want to destroy the feeling when they discover for themselves what's for real. I'm excited to get the audience feedback, I'm excited to be involved in the universe – I grew up reading comics – and it's just a real joy to be able to play in this sandbox every morning."

"There are going to be a few surprises left when people are seeing *Batman V Superman*. I don't want to give any of it away," says Snyder. "At the same time, we're in full pre-production on *Justice League*, so we're working a lot with Flash and Cyborg and Aquaman, and that's really exciting, because having all these amazing characters, working on their costumes and figuring out how do we show their powers for a visual effects standpoint, it's a lot of problem solving, and it's an honour to be working on the movie with these characters that have been around for so long."

Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice is out in cinemas on 25 March.

Judging by this image, the fight might not be the forgone conclusion it should be.



For the first time, Superman will truly let loose.



CRIMINAL DAMAGE

How much would it cost to fix the damage done by Supes in *Man Of Steel*?

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Washington, DC 20500
Tel: 1-844-872-4681

INVOICE #
[5797866]

DATE
12/06/2013

BILL TO
Kal-El
Address unknown

Destroyed government
wrist restraints **\$20**

Destroyed power
station cooling towers
\$300,000,000

Destroyed three corn
fields **\$1,200**

Destroyed petrol
station **\$500,000**

Destroyed 100+ cars
\$1,200,000

Destroyed small town
\$30,000,000

Destroyed three cargo
trains **£7,500,000**

Destroyed 50+
skyscrapers
\$70,000,000,000

Destroyed oil truck
\$50,000

Destroyed multi-storey
car park **\$1,000,000**

Destroyed marble bank
interior **\$200,000**

Destroyed surveillance
drone **\$12,000,000**

TOTAL
\$70,352,451,220*

*not including lawsuits

AT THE BOX OFFICE

0 100 200 300 400 500 600

SUPERMAN (1978) - \$461,732,900

SUPERMAN II (1980) - \$313,271,600

SUPERMAN III (1983) - \$153,207,100

SUPERMAN IV: THE QUEST FOR PEACE (1987) - \$32,284,500

BATMAN (1989) - \$506,784,700

BATMAN RETURNS (1992) - \$315,854,300

BATMAN: MASK OF THE PHANTASM (1993) - \$10,873,700

BATMAN FOREVER (1995) - \$340,563,300

BATMAN AND ROBIN (1997) - \$188,228,300

BATMAN BEGINS (2005) - \$257,881,000

SUPERMAN RETURNS (2006) - \$245,901,300

THE DARK KNIGHT (2008) - \$597,865,600

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES (2012) - \$463,691,500

MAN OF STEEL (2013) - \$279,584,300

■ SUPERMAN ■ BATMAN

Thomas Wayne
(Deceased)

Martha Wayne
(Deceased)

Batarang, Batclaw, smoke
grenades, flash grenades, Batcall

Bob
Kane

Bill
Finger

Black costume, black
cape, black bat ears

COMBINED BOX
OFFICE GROSS

BATMAN \$2,898,109,900

WORLDWIDE

SUPERMAN \$1,359,300,000

WORLDWIDE

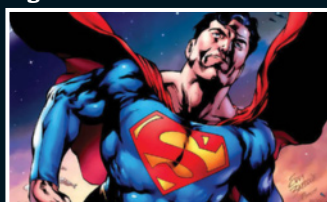
Jor-El
(Deceased)

Lara Lor-Van
(Deceased)

Kryptonian War Suit

Blue costume, red cape,
red and yellow S

Flight



Joe
Shuster

Jerry
Siegel

OSCARS

Batman
1 win Best Art Direction-Set Decoration

Batman Returns
2 nominations Best Effects in visual effects,
Best Make-up

Batman Forever
3 nominations Best Cinematography, Best
Sound, Best Effects (Sound Effects Editing)

Batman Begins
1 nomination Best achievement in Cinematography

The Dark Knight
2 wins Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role, Best Achievement
in Sound Editing
6 nominations Best Achievement in Cinematography, Best Achievement in
Film Editing, Best Achievement in Art Direction, Best Achievement in Makeup,
Best Achievement in Sound Editing, Best Achievement in Visual Effects

Superman
1 Special Achievement Academy Award Visual effects
3 nominations Best sound, Best Film Editing, Best Music (Original Score)

Superman Returns
1 nomination Best Achievement in Visual Effects

RING KEY

● VEHICLE ● PARENTS ● ACCESSORIES
● CREATED BY ● COSTUME

Batmobile



BATMAN

BREAKING
DOWN
DC'S NEW
DAWN IN
NUMBERS

SUPERMAN

BRINGING THE LEAGUE TOGETHER



**Batman and Superman
Shared Cover**
New York World's Fair Comics #2
(July 1940)



First appearance together
All-Star Comics #7
(October 1941)



**First meeting of Batman,
Superman and Wonder Woman**
All-Star Comics #36
(August 1947)



**First actual Batman-
Superman crossover**
The Mightiest Team In The World,
Superman #76 (June 1952)



**First appearance of
the Justice League**
The Brave And The Bold #28
(Feb 1960)



CYBORG

Created 1980
Alter ego Victor Stone
Home New York City
Skills Superhuman strength, intellect, healing, combat, technopathy, just generally being a cyborg with advanced prosthetics.



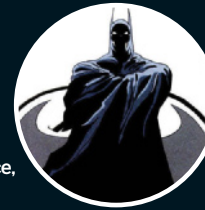
THE FLASH

Created 1940
Alter ego Barry Allen
Home Central City
Skills Superhuman speed, genius level chemistry knowledge, time travel.



AQUAMAN

Created 1941
Alter ego Arthur Curry
Home Atlantis
Skills Telepathy with sea life, superhuman strength, swimming speed, endurance, invulnerability, combat.



BATMAN

Created 1939
Alter ego Bruce Wayne
Home Gotham City
Skills Brilliant mind, exceptional combat skills, world's greatest detective, top of the line equipment, bottomless wealth.



SUPERMAN

Created 1938
Alter ego Kal-El/Clark Kent
Home Krypton/Metropolis
Skills Super strength, flight, super speed, heat vision, freezing breath, X-ray vision, superhuman endurance.



WONDER WOMAN

Created 1941
Alter ego Diana Prince
Home Paradise Island/Themyscira
Skills Superhuman strength, agility, endurance, reflexes and speed, master in hand-to-hand combat.

Original members Aquaman, Batman, The Flash, Green Lantern, The Martian Manhunter, Superman and Wonder Woman

JUSTICE LEAGUE

THE JUSTICE LEAGUE IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER, SO HOW DO DC'S BIGGEST HEROES WEIGH UP? FROM SUPERMAN ON FILM AND WONDER WOMAN PUMPELLING BATMAN TO LEX LUTHOR'S MOST HEINOUS ACTS, HERE'S THE INFO YOU NEED...

Red top, gold eagle breastplate, blue star-spangled culottes, red and gold boots, gold tiara

William Moulton Marston HG Peter

Zeus (God) Hippolyta (God)

Amazon bracelets, Lasso of Truth, sword, shield, razor sharp telepathic tiara

Invisible jet



“LEX GIVETH – AND LEX TAKETH AWAY”
ADVENTURE COMICS VOL. 2 #6



MEET LEX LUTHOR

First appearance: *Superman #4* March 1940.

Created by: Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster

Accidentally made bald by: Leo Nowak

Golden Age: Diabolical mastermind (Alexei Luthor)

Silver Age: Mad scientist

Modern Age: Super-rich business magnate

Runs: LexCorp

Crimes include: Destroying Metropolis, engineering the death of his parents, becoming US President and using his powers to try to destroy Superman, tried to turn people superhuman to humiliate Superman, mass murder.

Played by: Lyle Talbot (*Atom Man vs Superman*, 1950), Gene Hackman (*Superman*, *Superman II*, *Superman IV: The Quest For Peace*), Scott Wells and Sherman Howard (*Superboy*), John Shea (*Lois & Clark: The New Adventures Of Superman*), Michael Rosenbaum (*Smallville*), Kevin Spacey (*Superman Returns*), Jesse Eisenberg (*Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*)

Personal assistant/bodyguard: Mercy Graves

First character in a comic book to use an atomic bomb

KEY SMACK DOWNS



The Dark Knight Returns
Batman beats Superman with the help of kryptonite and Green Arrow. He fakes a heart attack and 'dies', but the victory is his.



Wonder Woman: Hiketeia
Batman wants to get his hands on a vigilante that Wonder Woman is protecting. She doesn't let that happen.



Superman: Sacrifice
Possessed by Maxwell Lord, Superman beats the hell out of Batman, leaving him broken in the hospital.



Superman: Sacrifice
Superman tries to beat Wonder Woman to death, but she knows he's possessed and ends Lord's influence.



Batman: Hush
Superman hunts down Batman, the Caped Crusader retreats, triggering the Batcave's anti-Superman failsafes.

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THE EVIL GENIUSES CONVENTION 2016

WHERE EVIL GENIUSES GET TOGETHER AND DISCUSS THEIR DIABOLICAL PLANS, GIVE PRESENTATIONS AND DRINK EVIL TEA

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER
ILLUSTRATIONS DAVID COUSENS



Pause



Volume

Filmed



12,641,522 Total views

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1 Lex Luthor (Superman)

He's the most famous and recognisable of Superman's villains, but is he the most diabolical? We think yes. The combination of corporate businessman and evil genius has had very diabolical consequences in the past, like the time he held a room full of millionaires hostage and used high-tech machinery to give himself super-strength and invulnerability so he could beat Superman. Or

that other time when he kidnapped and tortured Lana Lang to find out Superman's secret identity. The grudge he holds is nothing short of petty. The pair were childhood friends until that fateful day when a fire broke out and destroyed his laboratory and burnt all the luscious red hair from his head. From then on he blamed Superman for this baldness and sought to break him down, one evil plan at a time. Jesse Eisenberg's Lex Luthor has a full head of hair in the *Batman V Superman* trailers, so we're looking forward to seeing whatever is going to happen to that barnet.



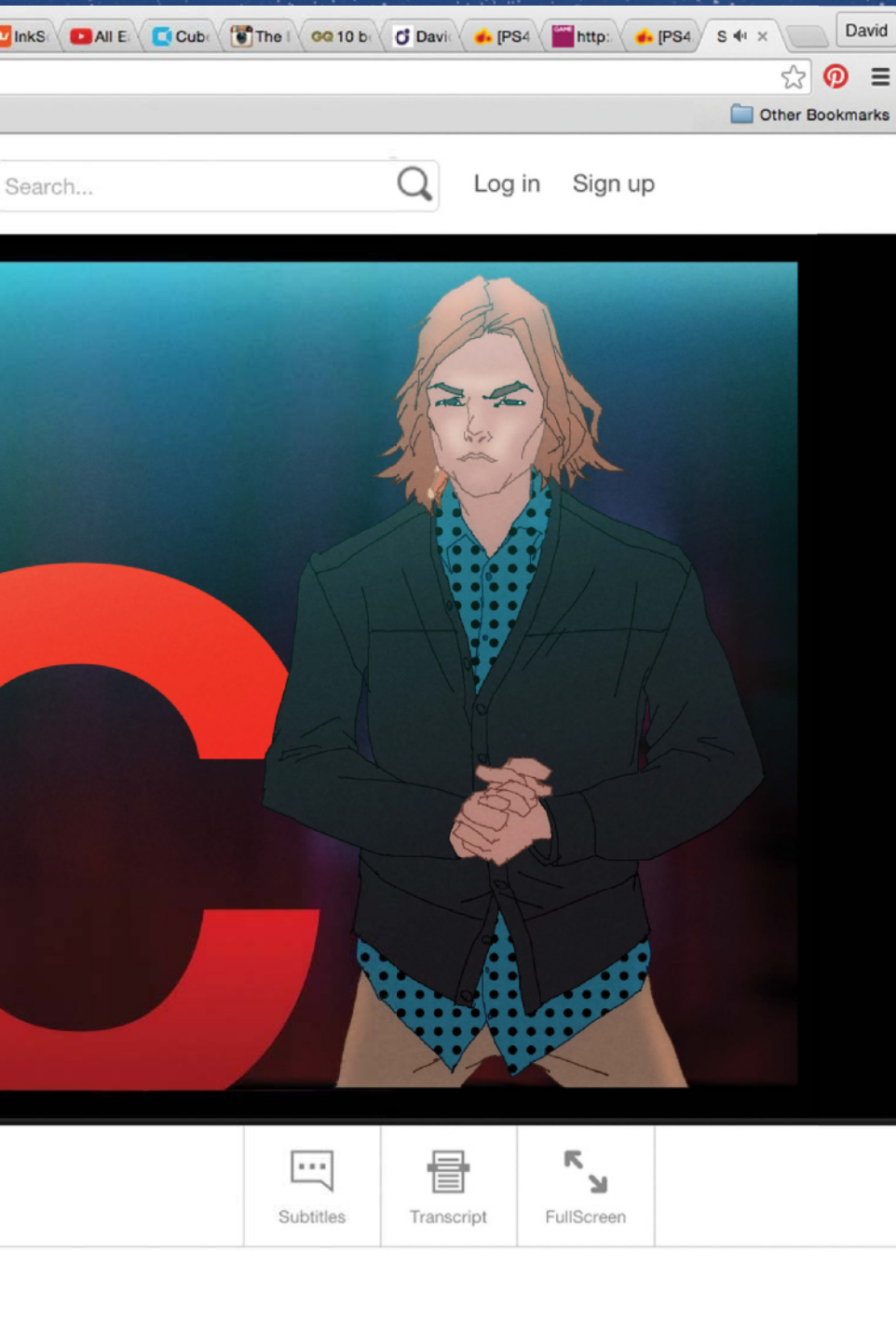
2 Ozymandias (Watchmen)

The worst thing about Ozymandias is that he didn't even realise how diabolical he was. He thought he was doing everything for the greater good, but it doesn't matter what your intentions were if millions of people end up dead. The label of evil genius almost doesn't apply to him, simply because that's not what he was in his own mind. Maybe a delusional genius...



3 Dr Evil (Austin Powers)

Everything about Dr Evil reeks of diabolical genius, from his name and facial scars to the bling on his pinky finger. His father would womanise and drink. He'd make outrageous claims like he invented the question mark or accuse chestnuts of being lazy, the sort of general malaise that only the genius possess and the insane lament. Like father like son, we guess.



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Evil Geniuses Convention 2017 #187217

4 Dr Horrible

(Dr Horrible's Sing-Along Blog)

Of all the world's evil geniuses, Dr Horrible started as one of the least evil ones, but oh, how he tried! He was more of a niche, fluffy-bunny brand of diabolical. His aspirations were high: his heart was firmly set on joining the Evil League of Evil, building a Freeze Ray and sharing a frozen yoghurt with Penny. With the Freeze Ray complete he was well on his way to becoming a verified supervillain, but then something happened that he could never have anticipated. Diabolical or not, he couldn't escape the fact that he had a heart. Having it broken was the final push he needed to become the evil genius he always wanted to be, for better or worse.

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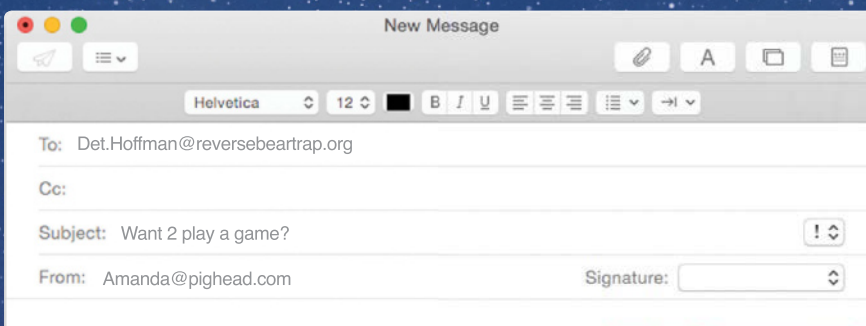
APPLY NOW.



5 Palpatine

(Star Wars)

In a world where Darth Vader tops almost every 'best movie villains' list, it takes someone very special and extremely diabolical to beat him to the mantle of the saga's overbearing evil tyrant. Palpatine has been at it from the start, plotting and lying his way through the prequels and finally reaching full power in the original trilogy. As a politician, he knew how to work the system, sucking up to the people that mattered and stepping over the ones that didn't. He was also a bit of a creeper, angling most of his attention towards grooming a young Anakin Skywalker.



6 Jigsaw (Saw)

So much time, planning and effort went into the Jigsaw Killer's diabolical plot. As a former civil engineer, he had the skills to orchestrate such nightmarish torture contraptions. It's clear he had the imagination of an evil genius of the highest order to dream up the nightmarish torture contraptions up in the first place. The Reverse Bear Trap? The Venus Fly Trap? The Butterfly Ribcage Trap? What level of sicko does someone have to be to think of these things, let alone carry them out?

He knows the importance of making sure someone carries on your work after you die. How are you supposed to make an impact in the world of diabolical badness when everyone forgets your name as soon as you kick the bucket? He's also bloody organised: despite being on his last legs, he seems to have a healthy supply of warehouses and storage space to carry out his deeds. What makes Jigsaw stand out is that he actually has a moral of sorts that he wants to convey to his, um, subjects. Appreciate the life you have, or someone will come along and make you rip your own jaw apart.



Attachments



play_a_g...mp4



instructio...txt



7 The Master (Doctor Who)

As the arch-enemy of the Doctor, the Master needs to be at least a bit of an evil genius if he's to stay on top of things. Working his way up the political ranks in Series Three until he was finally appointed Prime Minister, that little stinker used his newfound Earthian power to turn nations into work-camps and military bases, recruit the Toclafane to kill a third of the human race and start a war with the rest of the universe. Diabolical. But in true evil genius style, he was ultimately defeated – for a while at least. You need to get up earlier than that if you're going to pull one over on the Doctor.



8 Rotwang (Metropolis)

Rotwang was a traditionalist when it comes to diabolical evil. All he wanted was for his love for the beautiful Hel to be reciprocated, but things just weren't meant to be. Hel chose the master of the city Joh Fredersen over Rotwang, and eventually died while giving birth to Fredersen's son, Freder. Rotwang sought revenge, and created a robot in the form of a woman to replace Hel, which he used to sabotage both Fredersen and Freder. His plan went south pretty quickly, and ended with Rotwang spiralling into madness and falling to his death from the roof of Metropolis's cathedral.



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9 Hannibal Lecter (*Hannibal/Silence Of The Lambs*)

In the cannibal community, no one is more diabolical than Hannibal Lecter. No matter the setting – be it a book, movie or TV show – Lecter was relentless in his plotting, scheming and strategising, all with the aim of sinking his teeth into a juicy bit of human meat. The fact that he managed to get away with butchering, seasoning and consuming what he reckons are unsavoury folk for so long just convinces us further that he's a bona-fide evil genius. He even made his dining ritual something of a game, shooting hunters in the woods as they ran for their lives and cracking cannibal puns at dinner parties to see if anyone would notice. How did no one notice the puns?

However, the character reaches peak diabolical genius status in *The Silence Of The Lambs*, in which he was portrayed an extra creepy-ass version of Anthony Hopkins. Even though he spends a fair chunk of the film locked up in an apparently impenetrable fortress, he still managed to run the show. There's nothing he wouldn't do to get the upper hand, including cutting off his own. His genius also shines through every time he plays Clarice Starling like a fiddle, which is a *lot*. It's all part of his master plan. It's all quid pro quo. Sure, were rooting for Clarice all the way – she's such a good horror heroine – but Hannibal is just so darn fun to watch. Damn him and his diabolical ways, making us like him and causing us to question our own life choices.



Filmed



Subtitles



Transcript



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10 Kesslee (*Tank Girl*)

When the world experiences a decade-long drought, the man with access to water is king. In this story, that man is Kesslee. Holding the little remaining water in reserve, his corporation, Water & Power, has the population of the Australian outback under control by keeping everyone just thirsty enough to do exactly as it says. What a douche. But he gets even worse: as well as keeping tabs on the water in the reserves, he manually extracts it from people's bodies and gulps it down while standing over their lifeless, dehydrated corpses. Evil and diabolical, it's also genius, which is why he earns a spot among the most cunning villains around.

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO



Bill Finger

BATMAN V SUPERMAN WILL BE THE FIRST FILM TO OFFICIALLY RECOGNISE BILL FINGER AS THE CO-CREATOR OF THE DARK KNIGHT, AFTER HAVING HIS CREDIT SNUBBED FOR THE PREVIOUS 75 YEARS. AUTHOR MARC TYLER NOBLEMAN TALKS TO US ABOUT SEEING HIS WISH COME TRUE...

WORDS CHRIS ANDERSON

IN MARCH, BATMAN WILL FINALLY BE UNITED ON THE BIG SCREEN WITH AN IMPORTANT FIGURE FROM HIS PAST – NO, NOT SUPERMAN; WE’RE TALKING ABOUT HIS SECRET CO-CREATOR, BILL FINGER. SINCE HIS DEBUT BACK IN 1939 in *Detective Comics* #27, every comic-book story, TV show or movie has somewhere featured the words ‘Batman created by Bob Kane’. Last year, something changed, and the credit has since added ‘with Bill Finger’. *Batman V Superman* will be the first movie to include his name.

It is something that has been in the works for a while. Finger and Kane were a writer-and-artist team, and while Kane is thought to have originally come up with the name and a drawing of a character in red tights, a domino mask and huge bat wings, it was Finger who suggested a cowl, making the wings into a cape, and then named Bruce Wayne and Gotham City. But the original contracts had Kane listed as the sole creator, and while the comic-book industry and Finger’s family knew it was a dual effort, helping him gain recognition was never going to be easy.

But the cause was given a boost in 2012 by author Marc Tyler Nobleman, who released a

biography, *Bill The Boy Wonder: The Secret Co-Creator Of Batman*, which throws the spotlight on his contribution. He became the unofficial spokesperson for getting Finger credited, with interviews, Comic-Con panels and presentations, and even a TED talk. Now that his campaigning has paid off, how does he feel about it?

WHY IS BILL FINGER IMPORTANT TO *BATMAN*?

Bill Finger was the co-creator of *Batman*, but was officially uncredited during his lifetime and for decades after his death in 1974. He wrote the first Batman story [in *Detective Comics* #27] and 1,500 more over 25 years, including the first appearances of Robin, the Joker, Catwoman, the Penguin, the Batmobile and the Batcave. Batman’s origin story was his idea, he helped Bob Kane design the character’s look, and also nicknamed him the Dark Knight.

BUT KANE NEGOTIATED A PUBLISHERS DEAL WITHOUT HIM?

Yes. Bill and Bob got together one weekend in 1939 and came up with Batman. The following Monday, Bob went to the company that would become DC

Comics and negotiated a deal without Bill, not even mentioning that there was a Bill.

HOW WERE THE FOLLOWING YEARS FOR BILL AND BOB?

Bob soon farmed out his drawing duties to ghost artists. By the mid-Forties, Bob was neither drawing nor writing *Batman*, but was the only one credited, while Bill was still churning out stories for a page rate and no credit. By the Sixties *Batman* TV show, Bob was wealthy, and less than a decade later Bill died poor and virtually unrecognised.

BILL ACTUALLY WROTE AN EPISODE OF THE 1966 *BATMAN* TV SHOW. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

His sometime writing partner Charles Sinclair landed them that assignment. Charles knew that Bill’s contributions on *Batman* in print had been marginalised, so he offered to let Bill’s name be listed first in the credits for the show.

WHEN DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN HIS STORY?

I’ve been a DC superhero fan and a writer-in-progress since my early childhood. It was inevitable that these interests would meet at one

BATMAN V SUPERMAN

What Ever Happened To Bill Finger?

Ben Affleck will be the latest actor to take on the iconic role this year.



BILL WAS CHURNING OUT STORIES FOR A PAGE RATE AND NO CREDIT
MARC TYLER NOBLEMAN



Adam West and Burt Ward in the classic 1966 film adaptation.



point. I don't remember when or how I learned of Bill's role on *Batman*, but it was clearly an important story that somehow had not been covered in book form yet, so I seized it. I began the research in 2006.

WHO DID YOU SPEAK TO, AND WHAT WERE THEIR OPINIONS?

I contacted more than 250 people: comic creators who had worked with Bill, others in the industry who knew him, and most poignantly, people from his private life. Of the Golden Age writers and artists, I interviewed [Jerry Robinson, Arnold Drake, Alvin Schwartz, Irwin Hasen], all of them have since died.

HOW DID HIS FAMILY FEEL ABOUT IT?

I actually located Bill's sister, who was in her 90s, but she and Bill had been estranged since before *Batman*, so she didn't want to participate. But I tracked down a nephew and niece, who led me to the biggest find of all: Bill's lone and previously unknown grandchild. I also spoke to his cousins, some of whom didn't know that Bill was involved in *Batman*. Most were happy to talk, but the family was fractured and Bill was apparently fairly private. Plus, this all happened a long time ago.



Marc Tyler Nobleman has fought for Bill Finger's recognition for nine years.

HOW DID BOB AND BILL VIEW EACH OTHER?

Bob's 1989 autobiography, *Batman & Me*, revealed what he thought of Bill. He called him the unsung hero of *Batman*, and said he should be credited, but made no effort to follow it up. And in a 1965 letter to a fan, posted on my blog, Bill said that he was angry Bob had taken full credit for *Batman*. In a 1972 interview, in Thomas Andrae's book, *Creators Of The Superheroes*, Bill said he was a "tool" Bob used to bolster his pay cheque.

WHAT MADE THE CHANGE, AND WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG?

I'm thrilled. Bill's name will now be officially linked to *Batman*. I consider that a landmark win. It was helped by the determination of a legal heir, the nine-year campaign of an obsessive writer and the enlightened state of DC management. It took so long because it's not a simple process to adjust the credit line of a multi-million-dollar character. ☺



Bill The Boy Wonder: The Secret Co-Creator Of Batman by Marc Tyler Nobleman is available to buy now, distributed by Charlesbridge Publishing.

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Watch *the* Throne

AFTER A FIFTH SEASON THAT DIVIDED FANS, GAME OF THRONES LAUNCHES INTO THE UNKNOWN WITHOUT A BOOK TO WORK FROM. WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM SEASON SIX, AND SHOULD WE BE WORRIED?

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL



YOU CAN'T HAVE MISSED THE CONTROVERSY. *GAME OF THRONES'* FIFTH SEASON GOT FANS, HATERS, CRITICS AND CONVERTS RILED UP WITH CONTROVERSIAL STORYLINES, DIVERSIONS FROM the texts and taking its time moving through the plot. It also delivered some of the most jaw-dropping set pieces it has ever mounted, and this isn't exactly a series short on show-stoppers. We still get chills thinking about that incredible battle sequence between the Free Folk and White Walkers at Hardhome. And what about Jon Snow?

With Season Six approaching, this is the time when we start to put aside the problems we had with HBO's fantasy behemoth. Our concerns are normally pushed away by the sheer excitement of another return to Westeros and the anticipation of betrayal, bloodshed and another legion of beloved characters facing the chopping block. However, this will be the first year that finds every viewer on equal footing.

For the first time in the series' history, showrunners David Benioff and DB Weiss won't have a George RR Martin novel to directly draw from. Sure, there are a few lingering plot threads, but they've sailed right past *A Dance With Dragons* and, as of a blog entry from Martin on 2 January this year, the author has said that he still hasn't finished *The Winds Of Winter*.

Are we on the brink of a serious divergence? Could this be the first season that really separates the fans of the books from the fans of the series? How seriously should we take the fact that Martin isn't writing a script for the second year running? Is the show's treatment of women getting worse? And what about Jon Snow? Join us as we get to the heart of our fears and hopes for *Game Of Thrones* Season Six.

SEASON FIVE LEFT ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

As we've already mentioned, Season Five offered viewers some proper highlight-reel stuff, and not just in terms of action sequences. Seeing Tyrion Lannister (Peter Dinklage) finally meet up with Daenerys (Emilia Clarke) felt like a huge step up for the show as it finally started bringing its disparate strands together, which we've been told to expect much more of this year.

“THE SHOW IS WILLING TO DRAW ATTENTION THROUGH THE USE OF SEX AND VIOLENCE”
ELIO M GARCIA JR

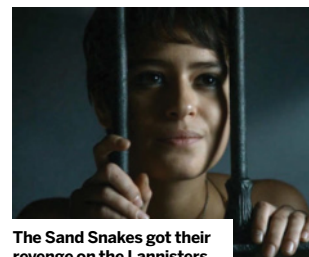
With both Jaime (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) and Cersei (Lena Headey) having suffered their own tragedies, the future's looking bleak for the Lannisters.

Still, you could also argue that we saw the show at its weakest. The storyline of Jaime (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) and Bronn's (Jerome Flynn) trip to Dorne felt like a huge disappointment. Given how strong the show's fight sequences have been, the scrap between the two visitors and the deadly Sand Snakes was strangely lacklustre.

"I think it was a serious misstep to remove Arianne Martell from the equation and reshape the Dorne story around her Sand Snake cousins and Ellaria (Indira Varma)," opines Susan Miller, editor in chief and co-founder of *Game Of Thrones* community *Watchers On The Wall*.

"Arianne's relationship with her father was ultimately the heart of that plot; cutting her gutted it and left Doran [Martell] with little to do. What a waste of Alexander Siddig! And instead of women plotting to raise Myrcella [Baratheon, played by Nell Tiger Free] up to be queen, we had them threatening and ultimately killing her."

"Their depiction of Dorne was a shadow of what was in the novels," agree Elio M García Jr and Linda Antonsson, founders of Westeros.org and writers of Westeros history bible *A World Of Ice And Fire*. "But we found the abrupt end to Barristan Selmy (Ian McElhinney) particularly sad. The character



The Sand Snakes got their revenge on the Lannisters.



has a far more notable role in the novels, and many had hoped to see it play out. We were both incredibly disappointed with the show's descent into farce when it came to Stannis Baratheon (Stephen Dillane). We doubt the intention was black comedy, but the way they just hammered Stannis (and the audience) with one disaster after another in quick succession seemed like another example of the writers going for exuberance over subtlety."

THE SANSA STARK PROBLEM

The accusations of misogyny aren't exactly new for *Game Of Thrones*. It's a criticism that the show has weathered since fairly early on, but it was particularly vocal last year. The rape of Sansa Stark (Sophie Turner) by Ramsay Snow (Iwan Rheon) – a crime which befalls Sansa's childhood friend Jeyne Poole in the novels – and the handling of that sequence was seen by many to be yet another example of the makers using sexual violence as a plot device. Geek culture website *The Mary Sue* decided to stop running coverage of the show altogether.

"Some of the furore has been overstated, and overheated as well, but it's clear that the show has often been very willing to push ➤



GAME OF THRONES

Watch The Throne



Bran Stark (Isaac Hempstead-Wright) with the 'Three Eyed Raven' (Max von Sydow).



Jaime failed to prevent the death of Myrcella (Nell Tiger Free).



Songs Of Thrones

The rockers who have appeared in Game Of Thrones

COLDPLAY

Remember 'The Rains Of Castamere'? Well, you may have been slightly distracted by the brutality of the Red Wedding, but look! There's Coldplay's Will Champion on drums.

GARY LIGHTBODY

Clearly someone on the *Game Of Thrones* team likes sad British music, as Snow Patrol frontman Gary Lightbody made up part of Locke's (Noah Taylor) travelling company, singing away on his horse.

SIGUR ROS

If someone breaks into song in *Game Of Thrones* then death is near, as evidenced by the appearance of Jón Þór 'Jónsi' Birgisson, Georg Hólm and Orri Páll Dýrason at Joffrey's wedding. Don't eat the pie.

MASTODON

Finally a bit of metal, as Brann Stark Dailor, Bill Kelliher, and Brent Hinds appeared as Wildlings in the epic Season Five episode 'Hardhome', and got brutally murdered by White Walkers. None more metal.

WILKO JOHNSON

Yes, the guitarist from Dr Feelgood was in *Game Of Thrones*. Bizarrely enough, the creator of the Duck Walk starred as mute executioner Ilyn Payne, the man who chopped off Ned Stark's head.

⇒ buttons and draw attention through the use of sex and violence," opine García Jr and Antonsson. "In the specific case of Sansa, we were initially quite neutral on the matter. After all, what happens to Sansa is similar to what happens to another character that is in that situation in the books. That said, we were concerned that it would take Sansa on a regressive path into victimhood when her narrative had been developing her towards taking control of her own destiny. Sansa did almost nothing to try to gain control over her own destiny this past season. This realisation made everything that had come before seem like a tremendous misstep by the writers; not because the specific content was objectionable, but a whole series of questionable writing choices were made to get there. Most critics have focused on the hot-button topics, and so the fact that Sansa's story arc was a prime example of bad writing for the past season is lost."

Miller points out that Sansa's treatment wasn't the only instance of the show not writing its women well. "I think the Dorne story made a misstep with regard to female characters, and the criticism around that plot was warranted," she tells us. "There was an opportunity there for an intriguing women-centered plot, but the show seemed more concerned with connecting the story back to Oberyn – a male character that was already beloved. It's not necessary to keep female characters completely untouched by the ugliness of the *Game Of*



As new players enter the fray, expect the body count to continue to rise.

Thrones world; fans simply want all major characters to have agency and a plot that serves them well."

IT'S NOT BASED ON A BOOK...

With *The Winds Of Winter* still in the future, Season Six will be the first time that the fans of the books will be on the same ground as the Unsullied. "It's frightening and exhilarating!" says Miller. "I hate and love it all at once, the not knowing. We're all on unsteady ground now."

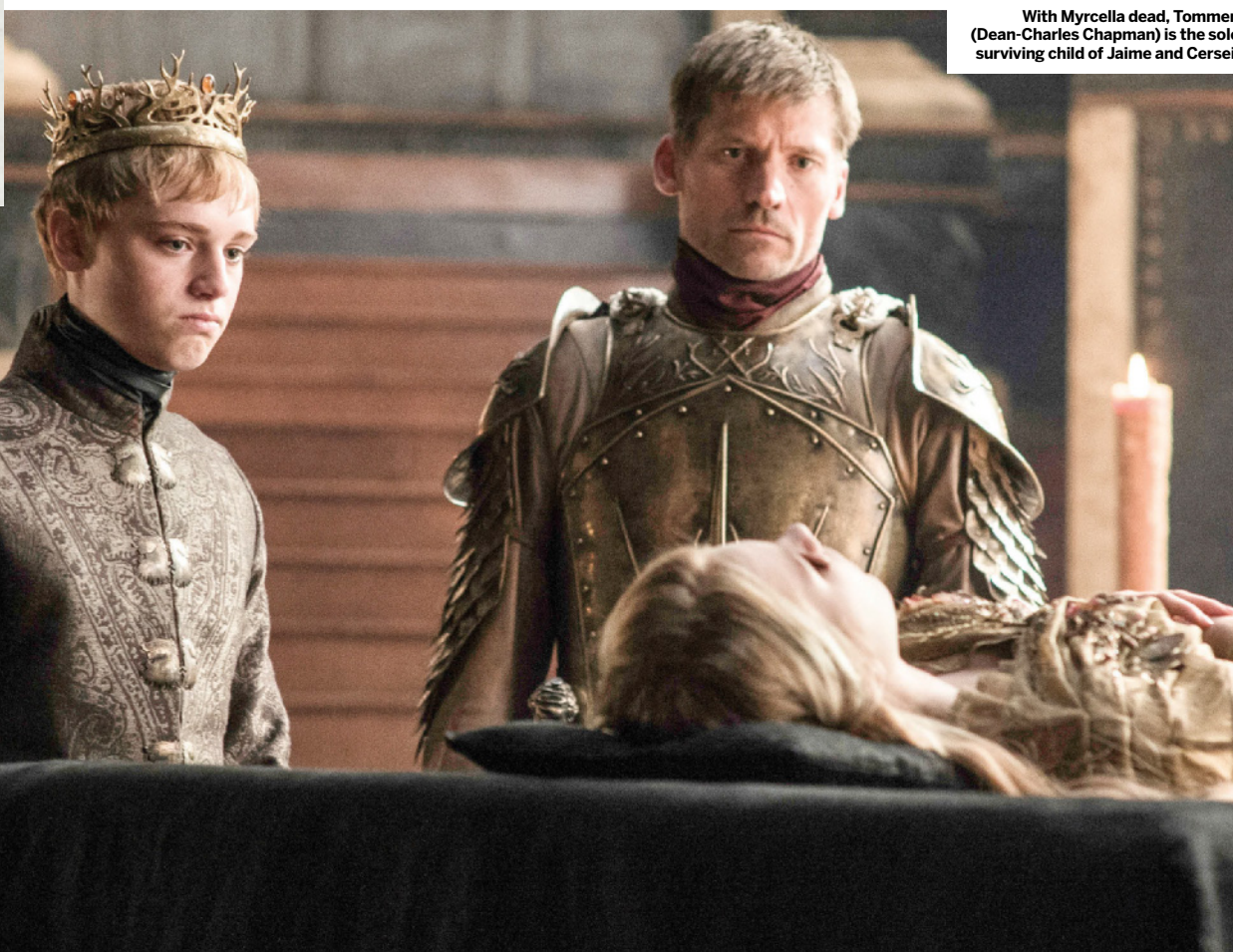
Although fans can look forward to not knowing what every major set piece from the Red Wedding to the Mountain and the Viper battle is building to, García Jr and Antonsson point out that there's a flipside to the excitement of an unpredictable series that has some readers worried.

"It's a positive in some ways, since in theory it should mean there will be more separation between the novels to come and

the series. Against that is the fact that the general outline of the narrative as Martin has planned it is being used by the writers, so there are bound to be major events and revelations that will be on the screen before they're in the novels. For those who see themselves as readers of the series first and foremost, that's definitely a concern."

So while we can expect to see elements of *The Winds Of Winter*, this is the second season in a row that comes to us without a script from Martin. Although some fans felt that his absence was noticeable, García Jr and Antonsson downplay those quibbles. "It would have been nice to see another script from him, but we understand why that wasn't the case," they tell us. "However, whether he writes a script or not, the showrunners Benioff and Weiss make all the decisions about what happens in any particular season. Even the scripts George wrote were based on breakdowns provided to him by the executive producers."

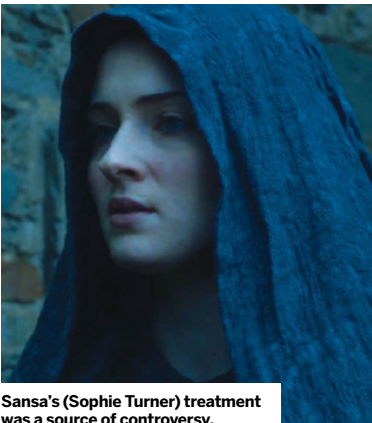
"Martin served as co-executive producer for Season Five," adds Miller. "As he has for most of the seasons. Clearly his input was a part of the equation. For example, David Benioff has mentioned discussing the burning of Shireen [Baratheon, Stannis' daughter, played by Kelly Ingram] with Martin beforehand, with Martin informing the showrunners of Shireen's fate in *The Winds Of Winter*. Martin didn't pen an episode, but I don't think that's a factor. The dominant voices in the show adaptation have always been Benioff and Weiss."



With Myrcella dead, Tommen (Dean-Charles Chapman) is the sole surviving child of Jaime and Cersei.



By the end of Season Five, Tyrion (Peter Dinklage) was back in power.



Sansa's (Sophie Turner) treatment was a source of controversy.



UT THERE'S STILL A LOT TO LOOK FORWARD TO

After moving at a leisurely pace, the show did what it does best in the final three episodes: build towards an absolutely stunning finale. Daenerys' position as a power player is in question after being dropped off with the Dothraki by a wounded Drogon; Arya (Maisie Williams) has been blinded; Sansa and Theon (Alfie Allen) have fled Ramsay, and Cersei (Lena Headey) has been stripped of her power. Oh, and Jon Snow (Kit Harington) was stabbed to death.

"People are hungrier than ever for new information," Miller enthuses. "Usually the book-readers can sit back smugly, enjoying our knowledge. This time around all of us are scrambling for titbits of info, wondering if this is the season we'll get confirmation of theories we've had for years."

With Benioff and Weiss showing that they weren't bound to the books, it's a best-guess situation. "There's so many things which are now impossible to show, because the moments have passed or the involved characters have met premature ends," García Jr and Antonsson tell us. "However, there are some moments in the Riverlands involving



“THE DOMINANT VOICES IN THE SHOW HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DAVID BENIOFF AND DB WEISS”
SUSAN MILLER

The Season Five finale saw Theon (Alfie Allen) and Sansa escape the clutches of Ramsay Bolton (Iwan Rheon).

Jaime that could be excellent if the writers were inclined to use the books."

There are also new additions, with some heavyweights joining the cast. We've got Ian McShane in a mystery role, Richard E Grant as a theatre manager, and the great Max von Sydow will be helping Bran (Isaac Hempstead-Wright) with his magic abilities as the Three-Eyed Raven. We will also get some exciting additions to some family trees, namely Lucy's Pilou Asbaek as Theon's uncle Euron Greyjoy, and we'll meet the rest of the Tully clan. Given that Sam's (John Bradley) father threatened to kill him if he didn't join the Night's Watch, we shouldn't expect a happy reunion. "Randyll Tully (James Faulkner) is a character that I didn't think we'd see on the show," enthuses Miller. "Sam's father is grade-A terrible person, but a fascinating character."

THE WINDS OF WINTER IS COMING...

Earlier this year, George RR Martin announced that *The Winds Of Winter* was still unfinished. Predictably, some fans took the news badly, while others pointed to the still-relevant Neil Gaiman post in which he stated, "George RR Martin is not your bitch." Seven years later, that fact hasn't changed.

"We're as eager to get our hands on the book as the next fan – perhaps more so, given our devotion to the series! – so we can understand feeling the occasional anguish," laugh García Jr and Antonsson. "But having a personal desire – however strong – for something doesn't give you a claim to the

person who provides it, so we absolutely agree with Gaiman's sentiment."

The situation resulted in Benioff and Weiss meeting with Martin to get an idea of where the story will go. While the situation isn't ideal, both sets of writers are making it work. "George is disappointed by this fact, as he had hoped to get it out by now," continue García Jr and Antonsson. "But ultimately this next season seems to be drawing a significant portion of its material from the extant novels as is, introducing storylines from *A Feast For Crows* that were passed over. That shouldn't be a problem. The fact that the story is now moving ahead of the novels... for people who see themselves as readers first and foremost, there's a lot of concern about 'spoilers.'"

WHAT ABOUT JON SNOW?

Finally, we have to address the bearded elephant in the room. So... Jon Snow?

"Dead – until Melisandre finds his corpse and that Chekhov's gun from Season Three (Melisandre's woody run-in with Thoros) goes off. Then, alive...ish," suggests Miller. "Oh, he's definitely dead," García Jr and Antonsson tell us. "He'll get over it." ☞

Susan Miller is the editor in chief and co-founder of *WatchersOnTheWall.com*. Elio García Jr and Linda Antonsson are the authors of *The World Of Ice And Fire: The Untold History Of Westeros And The Game Of Thrones*, available now from Harper Voyager. *Game Of Thrones* Season Six begins on 25 April on Sky Atlantic.

Who's next?

Place your bets on who lives and who dies...

SANSA

30/1 – They wouldn't. Not after last season.

ARYA

25/1 – Having been taken down several notches by the Faceless Men, we're confident that this season will see Arya rally rather than bow out.

DAENERYS

20/1 – She may be in a tricky situation right now, but it's definitely not her first. We can't see her dropping out yet.

TYRION

18/1 – Similarly, the Imp has too much left to do. However, being the biggest name on the show is still a risky business. Ask Ned.

MELISANDRE

15/1 – Seems untouchable, but that's often a death sentence.

LITTLEFINGER

11/1 – He seems like he's too clever to get killed, but he's too confident. You don't want to get too big for your breeches here.

CERSEI

7/1 – After a rude awakening, she's realised that she's not as untouchable as she thought. Could she finally fall?

JAIME

5/1 – The Kingslayer has done a lot of bad, a little good, but he's always watchable. We've got a bad feeling about him this year.

BRIENNE

5/1 – We love Brienne. We do. But she's kind of failed in most of her tasks. We see her going out while doing something heroic.



SNOW WHITE IS GONE, BUT HER LEGACY REMAINS. WE TALK TO THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR DIRECTOR CEDRIC NICOLAS-TROYAN ABOUT WHY THE FILM IS STILL VERY MUCH A WOMAN'S WORLD...

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

KILLER QUEENS

WITH KRISTEN STEWART MOSTLY ABSENT FROM THE SEQUEL TO SNOW WHITE AND THE HUNTSMAN, SHE HAS TAKEN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TITLE

(and thus the main protagonist) with her. The best thing the original film had going for it was that it showed Snow in a new light. She wasn't the dainty, house-keeping Disney princess we knew from past adaptations. She was a warrior, and she could hold her own in a battle of both brain and brawn.

Now that Snow's gone, we're left with Chris Hemsworth's huntsman, Eric, holding the fort, but according to director Cedric Nicolas-Troyan, who acted as second unit director on the first instalment, *The Huntsman* is still a female-driven film. Charlize Theron's brilliant evil queen, Ravenna, is back, and some new women have also been added to stir things up. Emily Blunt (*Into The Woods*) is playing Freya, the Ice Queen, and sister of Ravenna, while Jessica Chastain (*Crimson Peak*) is raiding the armoury as Eric's hunter wife, Sara. Even the dwarves – which were previously all men – have had a bit of a reshuffle, with Sheridan Smith (*Cilla*) and Alexandra Roach (*Utopia*) joining the mix. Could *The Huntsman* go the same way as *Mad Max: Fury Road* and become this year's surprise feminist hit?

"I don't know about feminist, but I certainly sure hope it's a film that promotes

and reveres all types of women, and I think it's very much a film that promotes women in very different ways," says Nicolas-Troyan. "Freya is a mother, Ravenna is someone who is a love-lust type of character, and Sara is woman who is really strong, but wants desperately to be in love again. There are different variations within those women. And then of course, there are the dwarves, who also have their own thing going on. I just think that women characters have a wider spectrum of emotion and action, and I think that it's so interesting to see them interact with each other and have them drive the story."

Does that mean *The Huntsman: Winter's War* could also be planning to pull another *Mad Max*, where the male titular character isn't actually the one running the show? "It's definitely the Huntsman's story, but it's like two storylines that are interwoven into one," says Nicolas-Troyan. "It's very

with each other on different projects again. That's the biggest proof of how great it worked between us, because we're all trying to work with each other again! So yeah, that was my favourite part by far, being with them and being different for them because they don't have the same needs. They're not looking for the same things. So trying to be the best I could be for every single one of them and being different, for me, was a great challenge, and a great reward at the end."

He also reckons we might end up seeing new sides to some of the actors, particularly Jessica Chastain as Sara, the warrior. "Ah, Sara. She's a badass. She's *really* badass. I think it was fun for Jessica to play because she doesn't usually play that type of character. It was really fun for me to work with her because I love those characters. She's equal; she's a huntsman too. She's not just one of the huntsmen; she's the leader of the huntsmen when Eric goes away. They're

much a battle of wills between people. We have two relationships that are living side by side, and are being interweaved within the story. There's the relationship between Freya and Ravenna, the two sisters, and then there's the relationship between Eric and Sara. They're both love stories: one is the story of love-lust, and one is the story of love rekindling and finding love again. Those two stories are really intertwined with each other throughout the entire timeline of the movie, and they're dependent on each other."

With the new characters come new performers. The cast of the first film was pretty impressive back in 2012, what with Stewart and Hemsworth getting ready to release the final *Twilight* film and *Avengers Assemble* respectively, and Charlize Theron just being Charlize Theron – but the sequel's cast is somehow even better.

"That's got to be the best thing that happened to me on this movie, working with those actors and actresses," Nicolas-Troyan tells us. "When you see the cast, you go, 'Oh, crap! That's kind of an impressive cast!' So for a first-time director you're thinking, 'Ooh, what's going to happen?' And to be honest I didn't know. So I went there with the best intentions, and it worked! I just wanted to be the best director that I could be for those actors and actresses, and it worked out. We had a really great experience on set together, so much so that we're now trying to work

husband and wife, so they are on equal footing. She's not the love interest of Eric, like she needs him to save her of anything like that. She's very much capable in her own right. She's really kick-ass, but they have this relationship together, and they're trying to find their way back to each other because they've been bad. They've been bad children. They misbehaved, and the queen is not happy with them."

Although he'd only helmed one short film before settling down in the director's chair for *The Huntsman*, Nicolas-Troyan was a perfect fit for the task. He already knew the world like the back of his hand after helping create it; he happened to be the visual effects supervisor on the first film, a job that he says came up out of the blue. "I was working on another project, and then all of a sudden this came around, and they were like, 'Oh, we want you to work on this movie.' I just didn't have a lot of time to think about it. It was like I was jumping on a train that was already leaving the station. I didn't really think to myself, 'Should I do it? Should I not?' It was more like, 'Alright, let's go!'"

The Huntsman also came for him in much the same way. "There were a lot of projects that were on, and yeah, obviously I was very much interested," he tells us. "It's a world that was very dear to me. I spent a lot of months creating it with Rupert [Sanders] on the first movie, so I was very interested. ➤

I BEG YOUR PARDON?

Hemsworth is the best and worst at not sounding like himself. How do other genre stars compare?

Chris Hemsworth as Thor (Thor)

Obviously Asgardians probably don't actually exist, but if they did they would definitely sound like Chris Hemsworth as Thor. It's the stuff dreams are made of.



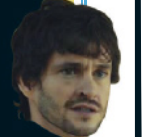
David Tennant as The Doctor (Doctor Who)

Tennant's beautiful Scottish accent is one of our favourite things about him, but he's managed to master an English one. If we didn't know, we wouldn't be able to tell.



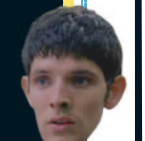
Hugh Dancy as Will Graham (Hannibal)

One of the best parts of being a Fannibal is when you finally discover that Dancy isn't actually an American. The other part is when you realise he was in *Ella Enchanted*.



Colin Morgan as Merlin (Merlin)

Over five seasons of *Merlin*, Morgan altered his natural Irish accent into an English one, which would have been perfect if he hadn't said 'person' in episode one.



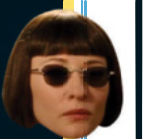
Karen Gillan as Nebula (Guardians Of The Galaxy)

Nebula was Gillan's first post-*Who* role, so we were expecting big things. The character was fun, and Gillan was a joy as always but the accent could have been a lot better.



Cate Blanchett as Irina Spalko (Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull)

As a two-time Academy Award winner, Blanchett's accents are usually spot on, but we still have no idea what she was trying to do in the fourth *Indiana Jones* movie.



Domhnall Gleeson as Bill Weasley (The Deathly Hallows)

His American accent in *Ex Machina* was perfect, but for some reason his Irish lilt made him sound a bit Australian in *Harry Potter*, and unlike the rest of the Weasley family.



Dick Van Dyke as Bert (Mary Poppins)

He may be everyone's favourite chimney sweep/pavement artist/one-man band, but he sounded like he'd never heard a human speak before, let alone a cockney one.



Chris Hemsworth as the Huntsman (Snow White And The Huntsman)

It still baffles us that Hemsworth was the only person in the film with a Scottish accent, and also the only person that didn't seem to have the capacity to do a good one.



➤ But then things happen, things don't happen, you go on other projects, and then all of a sudden, the next thing you know is the thing has gone full circle, and you're like, 'Oh, we're going!'"

Along with *Snow White And The Huntsman*'s new look at an old character, one of the things that made it stand out was that it was extremely aesthetically pleasing, especially where magic was involved, so there's pressure on the sequel to match it. "Obviously that was one of the things that we had to do in keeping the visual aspect of the first movie, but also trying to offer something that is different," says Nicolas-Troyan. "You want to bring back the stuff that you loved in the first movie, but then you want to add a little bit of other stuff about it. You're not reinventing the wheel, but you're also not just showing all the same things from the previous one. You liked the enchanted forest? We're going back there! But we're going to show it a little differently. We have things that are very reminiscent of the first movie, but it's a new take on it.

"I think people are going to be surprised how funny the movie is. I think people don't expect it to be that much fun. That's one of the things that is very different from the first movie. The first movie was darker. This one is lighter. It's a little bit more light-hearted. We're offering something that is a little different. The first movie was exploring one relationship, and this one is exploring something else, so I think people are going to be surprised about how fun it is."

With the unfaltering popularity of classic fairy tales made into big-budget films, *The Huntsman* needs to stand out to stay ahead of the game. But what is it about fairy tales that inspires masses of viewers to keep on seeing stories that they've heard many times before? "I think it's because they are

universal," says Nicolas-Troyan. "The stories are very simple. It's always about love, and it's always about children, whether they are eaten, captured or this or that. They're very simple stories about what is right and what is wrong, and what is good and what is bad. They've been told first, and then they have been written, and then they have been read, and after that we've made cartoons out of them, and now we're making movies out of them because it's possible. It's just that the tool of telling the same stories has changed, but the stories remain the same. I think it's because the cores are very simple things, and yet they resonate with everyone." ☞

The Huntsman: Winter's War will be released in cinemas on 4 April.



PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE SURPRISED AT HOW FUNNY THE MOVIE IS
CEDRIC NICOLAS-TROYAN

The dwarves also return to the character line-up.



Sara (Jessica Chastain) isn't just Eric's (Chris Hemsworth) love interest; she's a leader too.

The film shows two different relationship dynamics: husband and wife, and sibling love.



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NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED





THE KINGPIN MAY BE BEHIND BARS, BUT THE CHAOS IS JUST GETTING STARTED. AS THE PUNISHER AND ELEKTRA BEGIN TO SHAKE THINGS UP FOR DAREDEVIL IN SEASON TWO, WE TALK TO THE CAST AND CREW ABOUT RETURNING TO HELL'S KITCHEN...

MARVEL'S NETFLIX EXPANSION HAS SO FAR BEEN DAMN GOOD AT ANTAGONISTS. ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF DAREDEVIL'S FIRST SEASON WAS

being let into the wonderful but thoroughly messed up world of Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio). In the same year, *Jessica Jones* wowed and disturbed with David Tennant's take on the Purple Man. Both were complex, captivating and, though neither of them would believe it, undeniably villains. For Season Two of *Daredevil*, however, the lines between good and evil are being blurred beyond recognition.

When the protagonist of your show is a vigilante himself, it takes someone really special (and really evil) to be the opposing force. Now that Fisk has been incarcerated, a couple of new players need to step in to cause real chaos for Matt Murdock.

"I think there's a sense at the beginning of the second season that for six months or so, things have kind of returned to normalcy," says Charlie Cox, who plays Murdock. "With Fisk away, there's a sense that Matt has been able to relax a little bit... he's come to terms with who he is, and he's come to terms with what he's capable of. He's no longer having that argument in his head and his heart so much any more. There's a period of time when he's able to just enjoy it all. And then of course, one person in particular shows up, and that throws everything into disarray all over again."

That one person in particular is Frank Castle (played by the marvellous Jon Bernthal), a former US Marine Captain more commonly known as the Punisher. Like *Daredevil*, he has his own way of dealing with things. "Punisher, I think, is more of an antihero really, and that's one of the things that I always liked about this show:

it's not so black and white," Cox tells us. "It operates in the grey areas, and it poses questions rather than present you with good and evil. And that's at least the aim. With Frank Castle showing up, what happens to Matt emotionally is hopefully as interesting as the plot of what actually happens in the show, because of course, what he represents is something that Matt recognises in himself on the one hand, but at the same time could not possibly agree with his methods."

"It's an enormous honour to play this character," says former *Walking Dead* star Bernthal. "He's a character that's very iconic, and he's important to a lot of people. I'm extremely humbled to have the job, and I look at it as a real responsibility to try to get it right. In my opinion, what was so successful about Season One was how layered and complex the characters were, and how rich the series was. A lot of Season One was about Matt Murdock dealing with this decision to be a hero – but then comes along this guy, the Punisher, who is really not concerned about being a hero. His superpower is his rage. His superpower is that he is not going to quit. He is going to go forward no matter what. He has a different sense of justice. The level of physical discipline that this show and this role required from me was unlike anything I've ever done before. It's full on, and it keeps going. It never stops! The fight team on *Daredevil* is extraordinary."

"I think what's key is that these guys are not two superheroes; they are two complex men who have gone through a lot in their lives. I think the writers were courageous enough to let these characters delve into a genuine relationship. Opinions can change. It's not black and white, and I think that's what made me a fan of Season One." ➤

Elodie Yung will portray Elektra in Season Two of *Daredevil*.



➤ As well as being a *Daredevil* fan, Bernthal is a fan of Charlie Cox. “Charlie’s work is unbelievably grounded and authentic,” he says. “His confession scene [from Season One] was the first thing that I saw, and I was hooked right away. When I saw that scene, I said, ‘The level of work in this show is unbelievable. If that’s what these guys are going for, I want to play with them.’ It was very easy for me to sign up to the show after I’d seen what they did.”

For many fans of the first season, the Punisher was at the top of the list of ‘characters we want to see *Daredevil* fight’, so his addition to Season Two alone was something of a treat. Now that we’re also getting Elektra Natchios, Matt Murdock’s ex-girlfriend, it’s practically Christmas. Much like with the Punisher, she couldn’t have been cast better if we’d done it ourselves. French actress Elodie Yung (*Narcopolis*) is a perfect fit for the assassin/martial artist to the point where it’s like she’s been preparing for the role her whole life. With a black belt in karate and decades’ worth of training, we’re sure she will kill it.

“Elektra is a highly trained killer, and unless you have people who are very good at faking it, I think it helps to have someone who’s able to really throw a punch, a kick and all that,” Yung tells us. “This is a very exciting job for me. Being an actor, I’m trying to understand who this person is – but she is very complex. I don’t think she’s good or bad, and I would never judge that. I think she has some element of good, and she has some element of bad in her, which is the same for everyone. She is a person with different traits. She’s a person with many layers, and she’s seeking who she is. In this season, there’s an arc to her story. Hopefully we’ll find out who she is by the end of it.”

“I really love Elektra. I’ve really enjoyed building the character and bringing some

Life Is Pain

Ranking the characters on the Foggy angst scale

Matt Murdock

Last season saw Matt confront some demons, old and new, and figure out just how far he would go to protect his city. On the plus side, he’s made new friends, he’s told his oldest friend his biggest secret, he got a brand new suit, and he didn’t have to kill anybody. Maybe he’s doing okay?



Karen Page

You could argue that Karen should have a higher rating. She killed a guy. Her new friend was killed. She saw all the darkness in the big, scary city, and she’s still sitting on a big goddamn secret that she won’t tell her employers about. But you know what? Karen gets on with it.



Wilson Fisk

You could say that Wilson was driven by angst into becoming the Kingpin. His rough childhood and Daddy issues led him to try to fix the city in an incredibly violent (that car door!) and illegal way. We can’t imagine *Daredevil* ruining everything for him as helped his temper problems.



Foggy Nelson

The fact that the metric we’re using is based on him should give you some clue about how angst-ridden Foggy is. Your friend has superpowers. He’s out helping people. He’s a hero. And your life is absolutely fine compared to everyone else. Move past it or make good on your threat to be a butcher.



“THE PUNISHER’S SUPERPOWER IS HIS RAGE. HE’S NOT GOING TO QUIT”
JON BERNTHAL

personal elements to her. I’ve tried to get her grounded and real. I’ve also tried to empathise with her on some things that we don’t have in common; I’ve tried to understand why she would react to the way she does. She’s a sociopath. She’ll use anything she needs to use to get to her goal. If she needs to kill people, she will. She has this coldness in her, which is something I tried to keep in the character.”

“In the first season, our story was about Matt Murdock and his decision to become a hero,” says Marvel Television head Jeph Loeb. “Our second season is pretty much about what it is to be a hero. Rather than simply show him going through the paces, it gave us an opportunity to bring two iconic and important characters from the comics. We didn’t just pluck characters out of the sky; they each brought a different interpretation of what justice is. One of those characters is Elektra, the other is Frank Castle... In the simplest terms, Frank Castle sees the world in a very black and white way. What Elektra brings to it – and in particular in the way that Elodie Yung portrayed her – is the fact that she lives in the grey.”

Relationships were a large part of the show during its first season: Matt’s ➤



The Punisher's actions puts him at odds with Daredevil.



Rosario Dawson returns as Claire Temple.



Inside the mind of the Punisher

40% vengeance
They gotta pay.
They all gotta pay.

15% civic duty
They gotta pay, particularly if they've done anything even remotely bad.



30% grief
They killed my wife. They killed my kids. Which is why they gotta pay.

10% military training
They gotta pay and I know exactly how to make them pay most efficiently and/or painfully.

5% lone wolf mentality
I don't play well with others. Unless they're also making people pay.



➤ relationship with Foggy Nelson (Elden Henson), his relationship with Karen Page (Deborah Ann Woll), Foggy's relationship with Karen, Fisk's relationship with Vanessa Marianna (Ayelet Zurer). After some unsatisfying loose ends, there's a lot left that hasn't even been touched on.

"I think that one of the things that [Season One showrunner] Steven DeKnight did that I thought worked very well at the end of the first season, was that we wanted to finish that season with a sense of triumph and give the impression that something great had been accomplished," says Cox. "At the same time, there was a lingering feeling that some things have been resolved, and other things haven't. So there's still a ways to go in terms of dealing, mainly emotionally, with all the discoveries that have been made. There's that scene outside Nelson & Murdock when Foggy goes off to see the girl he's been seeing, and Matt says something to Karen about, 'I know that not everything's okay, words to that effect. And so this season I think we'll begin to learn... I mean, a lot happens, so there's only so much time to talk about one's feelings in the second season."

"Very quickly we hit the ground running, and we meet new characters, and it kind of escalates from there," Adds Cox, "But there is a sense that Foggy and Matt still have a lot of ground to cover. That the wounds that were inflicted based on Matt's lies or dishonesty haven't just healed completely, and maybe their relationship is more fractured than Matt had hoped. And similarly with Karen, Karen poses a real problem for Matt in some ways, because I think one should feel like that, as an audience member we should feel that Karen is a real potential love interest for him. Those

two have so much in common, and they're so right for each other in so many ways, and she's exactly the kind of person that he wants to be with. She's the kind of person that he would like himself to be able to fall for. But at the same time she doesn't know his biggest secret, so how can he truly be himself when there's this huge gap in what she knows about him?

"That's one side of Matt that Elektra does know," Cox continues. "So it's very tempting for him, regardless of whether we feel that Elektra is good or bad for Matt. What's great about her presence for him, what's addictive from his point of view, is that he doesn't have to pretend to be anyone."

"One of the things that is very important about the story of Matt and Elektra is that he's this pug from Hell's Kitchen," adds Loeb. "He's the son of a boxer. He's a lower-income Irish kid who grew up fighting in the streets. He had a father who tried to convince him that the world is not solved

by punching people, and yet that's what he winds up doing as an adult. Then he meets this woman who is worldly and travelled. She speaks other languages and she comes from money. She has grace. That weighed heavily in our decision to have Elodie, because she has all those things. When Elodie and I talked about the character, one of the things she always brought up were the layers in the writing. With every line, there are multiple levels. Is she teasing? Is she threatening? Is she being funny? The answer was always: it's all those things."

The characters aren't the only things that are new for *Daredevil*'s second season. Doug Petrie (*Buffy The Vampire Slayer*) and Marco Ramirez (*Fear The Walking Dead*) joined the series as co-showrunners after DeKnight left the post last year. However, the old *Daredevil* themes are more or less the same: everything is still going to shit for Hell's Kitchen.

"For me, the underlying themes are vengeance, pain and loss, and the search to

right wrongs," says Bernthal. "Maybe I'm a selfish actor, but I look at it very much through my own character's eyes. That's certainly what Frank is going through when we meet him in *Daredevil*."

"The issues of morality and truth are something that will constantly challenge our hero," Loeb explains. "We should continually want to ask, 'Is Elektra telling the truth, or is she telling her version of the truth?' Since Matt's goal is always to seek out justice – and we have to remember that he's also an attorney – he is looking at the world differently than many of us look at the world. In his eyes, there is a sense of right and wrong. He also believes that justice is something that can be proven, which is different to Elektra's attitude. Elektra is always thinking about whose interests are best served, and that may be hers." ✍

Daredevil: Season Two premieres on Netflix worldwide on 18 March.



Matt Murdock (Charlie Cox) will continue to get close to Karen Page (Deborah Ann Woll).

Elektra Reborn

How to get Frank Miller's assassin right

While most of the marketing for Season Two has focused on the arrival of Jon Bernthal's Punisher, the introduction of Elektra is just as exciting for *Daredevil* fans, and just as crucial to get right. We've already suffered through an *Elektra* film so bad that we're actually grateful that it's so forgettable, but there's such a great opportunity to bring one of Marvel's great female badasses to brilliant life. So with that in mind, here are a few key things to get right.

1 Make her deadly
Elektra is a ruthless killing machine for hire – at least she is in the earlier parts of her journey. She's had an incredibly painful life, and she's been trained by the very best. If she's not convincingly deadly then we will be disappointed.

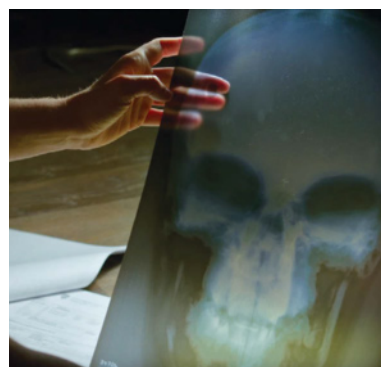
2 Don't try and get every part of her back story in there
Some of her past is extremely dark, and we wouldn't necessarily recommend staying away from that. What we would be cautious about is the introduction of the more supernatural and mystical elements of the character. Still, with Netflix's emphasis on grounding the show, this shouldn't be too much of a problem. And we don't want her to be humourless either.

3 Don't do what the films did
While we've got no beef with Jennifer Garner, there was very little of what we loved about Elektra in either the *Daredevil* movie or her solo film. The first saw her in 'tragic love interest' mode with a leather outfit, and the other introduced lots of potentially great mystical elements (Stick, Typhoid Mary) and just wasted them.

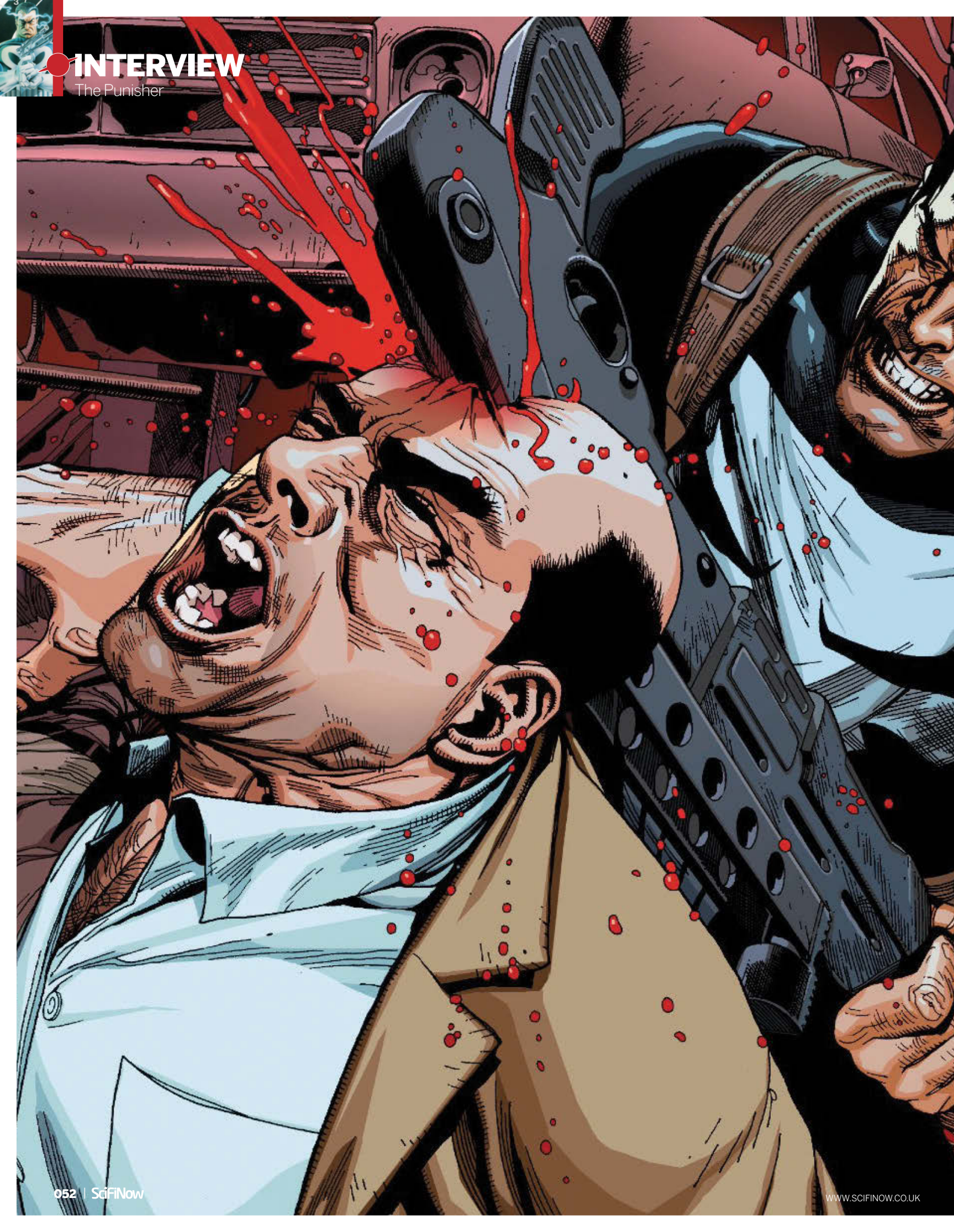
4 Give her enough time to make an impact
The Netflix TV show is a busy place. Even before the arrival of Elektra and the Punisher, there's Matt's friends Karen and Foggy, and we can't imagine that the new season will completely exclude Wilson Fisk. Frank Castle might be the more obvious dramatic opposite of *Daredevil*, but Elektra is just as important and potentially brilliant. Make sure she has the time to shine.



It appears that even tougher times are ahead for Matt.



Jon Bernthal will be the first small-screen Frank Castle.



INTERVIEW

The Punisher

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

AS MARVEL'S REVENGE-FUELLED VIGILANTE PREPARES TO MAKE HIS TV DEBUT, WE TALK WITH GERRY CONWAY, GARTH ENNIS AND STEVEN GRANT ABOUT THE PUNISHER'S MOST FURIOUS RAMPAGES OF REVENGE...

WORDS RUSSELL SHEATH

AS THE PUNISHER'S WAR ON CRIME ENTERS ITS FOURTH DECADE, FRANK CASTLE STANDS POISED TO BRING HIS UNRELENTING FORM OF JUSTICE TO HELL'S Kitchen – and Netflix – in *Daredevil*.

A Vietnam veteran and Marine Corps hero, Castle's family were gunned down when they unwittingly stumbled upon a mob hit in Central Park. Enter the Punisher, as Frank is reborn as a relentless, gun-wielding vigilante whose black and white vision of justice would set him against villains and heroes alike.

Beginning life as a Spider-Man antagonist, the Punisher's origin couldn't be more different to the characters born of the atomic age. The Hulk, Spider-Man and *Daredevil* all gained their powers courtesy of radioactive accidents; the source of the Punisher's power is the vengeance he wreaks on the criminal underworld.

Punisher co-creator Gerry Conway sheds some light on the character's beginnings. "It was late 1973, and Stan Lee asked me to create a storyline to bring back Gwen Stacy," he reveals.

"Stan had been taking a lot of heat for the death of Gwen, and he wanted to create a story where we bring her back so he wouldn't get yelled at as much. I started thinking about bringing Gwen back in a way that would have

some emotional resonance, which led to the idea that it's not really Gwen, but a clone, which led to the idea of working out who might create a clone of Gwen Stacy. That villain became the Jackal, but I wanted to give him more authority than just be a mysterious villain. One way to do that was to give him a henchman, someone who would go out under the Jackal's influence with a mission to kill Spider-Man."



The look and the name would require some extra refinement, and Conway looked to legendary artist John Romita and Wolverine co-creator Len Wein for inspiration. "I drew a sketch of this guy in a black outfit with a small skull on his chest, which I took to Romita," explains Conway. "John expanded the skull, created the belt that forms the teeth, and we settled upon calling the character 'The Assassin'. But as I began talking to Len Wein about the character, we decided that we wanted a name that had more resonance."

"In true Stan Lee fashion, Stan asked, 'What does the character do?' I replied, 'He goes around and kills people he thinks are bad guys. He's the embodiment of crime and punishment.' To which Stan goes, 'Well, that's it; let's call him... the Punisher!'"

From his first appearance in *Amazing Spider-Man* #129 in 1974, the Punisher became a runaway hit with fans and creators alike, making several appearances in *Amazing Spider-Man* and Frank Miller's character-defining run on *Daredevil*.

Drawing parallels between the success of his creation and the social zeitgeist of America in the Seventies, Conway offers, "New York City in the Seventies was a real cesspool with very high crime. The police were kind of ineffectual, and there was a social meme about vigilantes in real life and with movies like *Death Wish*."

"You wouldn't have been able to create the Punisher in the Sixties, as the Comics Code Authority was so strong that they wouldn't let you portray him as a sympathetic character. In the Eighties you had a very authoritarian government under Reagan, and anyone who was on the side of law and order would have been considered suspect, so the Punisher wouldn't have been considered sympathetic." But come the mid-Eighties, the Punisher would really capture imaginations.

1986 saw a rebirth for the Punisher as writer Steven Grant and artist Mike Zeck, made Castle grittier and more realistic. Grant explains, "I felt



Punisher has evolved from guest-starring villain to Marvel mainstay.

it was important to play the Punisher seriously and for him to be more 'real world', dumping all cheesiness that had gone before. Years later, I heard from Gerry Conway, who said he'd always wanted to go that way with the Punisher, but editorial restrictions forbade it."

The success of the miniseries, titled 'Circle Of Blood', catapulted the character to new heights, with an ongoing monthly comic and a number of spin-off series including *Punisher War Zone*, *Punisher War Journal* and *Punisher Magazine*. There was even *Punisher Armory*, a kind of *Guns & Ammo* for adolescents, where Frank Castle offers readers insight into his favourite tactics and weapons.

Returning to *The Punisher* five years after 'Circle Of Blood', 'Return To Big Nothing' saw Grant and Zeck once again make their mark on the character.

"One thing Mike and I did was stop referring to him as Frank, as we find out he doesn't actually self-identify as Frank Castle at all," offers Grant, delving into his troubled psychology.

"He comes to deny the Frank Castle identity, saying 'Frank Castle died with his family. I'm the Punisher.' I wanted to undercut the 'They killed his wife and child!' vengeance cliché. Frank Castle was just one more poor loser who couldn't get the job done. He's just

someone else who's dead and means nothing to the Punisher. Nor does Castle's family. That was somebody else's life, somebody else's family."

As the shell cases rained down, each new title further cemented him as one of Marvel's key characters, with writers including Chuck Dixon, Mike Baron and Larry Hama establishing their influence on the blood-soaked vigilante. But his success was to prove short-lived.

If the Eighties saw a boom in *The Punisher's* appeal, then the mid Nineties marked a low point. Following the explosion of speculation in the comics industry in the late Eighties and into the following decade, the mid Nineties marked a decline for the comics industry. As Marvel faced bankruptcy, gone were the gritty, edgy stories that had proven popular with fans. In their place were more outlandish adventures.

The Nineties also saw short-lived efforts to breathe new life into the character with relaunched miniseries and even a story where the Punisher appears as a literal 'avenging angel'. Despite a flawed start, the Marvel Knights imprint would signify a changing of the guard at Marvel, rejuvenating the fortunes of the publisher and *Punisher* alike.

The new millennium saw *Preacher* creators Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon

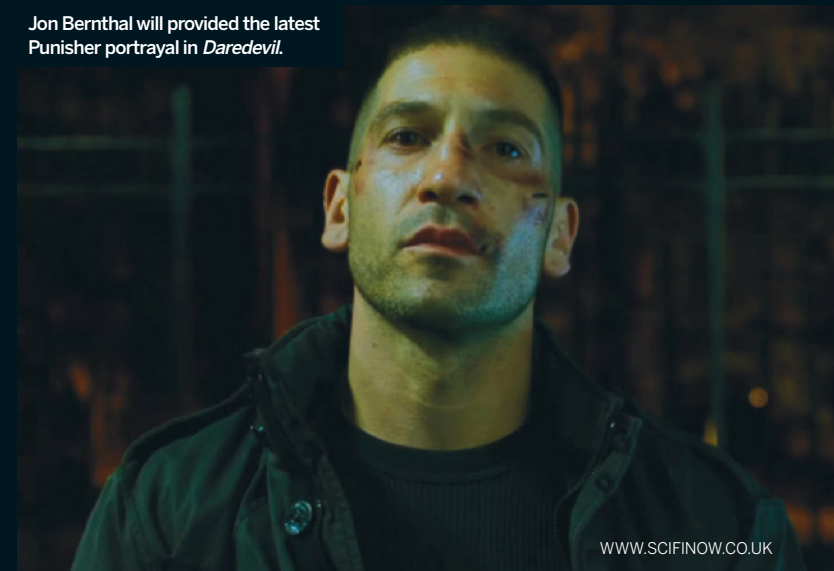
return to Marvel. Bringing with them their dark humour, the duo would relaunch the Punisher in 'Welcome Back Frank'. "When I first wrote the Punisher for Marvel Knights, it was almost as a lark – a chance to showcase some sub-Tarantino OTT violence," offers Ennis. "The Punisher worked his way through a series of larger-than-life freaks and grotesques while taking the piss out of superheroes. The tone is pretty goofy, and you can almost hear the *Merrie Melodies* theme playing in the background for a lot of it."

Ennis drew upon the British comics of his youth, blowing away any trace of angelic wings and even the white skull

“IN TRUE STAN LEE FASHION, HE ASKED, ‘WHAT DOES THE CHARACTER DO?’ I TOLD HIM, AND HE SAID, ‘WELL THAT’S IT, LET’S CALL HIM THE PUNISHER!’

GERRY CONWAY

Jon Bernthal will provide the latest Punisher portrayal in *Daredevil*.





and classic costume that had become the character's trademark. "The Punisher reminds me of the characters I read as a kid – Dredd, Strontium Dog and Dredger," he explains. "He's a gunfighter rather than a superhero."



This was a new Punisher for a new era, but neither Castle nor Ennis were taking prisoners. "The *Punisher MAX* book was a different kettle of fish. What influenced it was 9/11, and the grim turn America in particular – and the world in general – took at the time. I wanted to write about that – the sense of life being turned upside down and people feeling rudderless, cast adrift, staring hopelessly into the dark. I realised I had the perfect vehicle with which to talk about such ideas for a mainstream audience: the Punisher."

This new take would see Castle take on real-world problems and enemies, finding himself in the firing line of the CIA, the SAS and the IRA, as well as on the forefront of the war on terror.

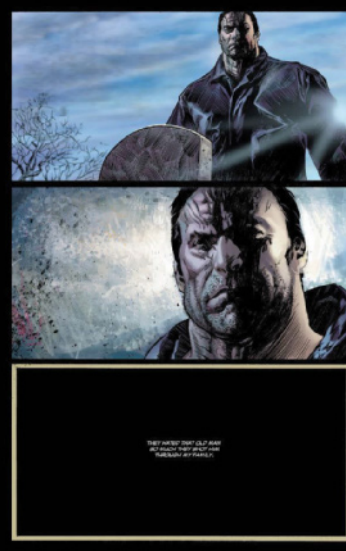
"What's great about the Punisher is that he's a kind of Rorschach test and a great reflection of where society is at that moment," offers Conway. "You have the fundamental of the role of honourable man in society and the person who sees injustice. How far do you go? The Punisher is a guy who, in

the real world, would be considered a dangerous person. The question Frank raises is one of, 'Is society doing its job?' Given the social context, different writers will see different values in him."

Recently, writers like Mark Millar, Matt Fraction, Rick Remender and Greg Rucka have added their spin on the his plight, as he continues to find an audience with each iteration.

"In the Seventies, the biggest thing you could fantasise was that a character might make it into a Saturday morning cartoon," Conway enthuses. "There have been three *Punisher* feature films, and I've not seen any of them, but I'm really looking forward to seeing the Netflix version on *Daredevil*. It really is an unusual story about how a character that was created as a minor, secondary character has gone on to have such cultural significance."

"I haven't seen *Daredevil*... I don't watch superhero stuff, but if they do a *Punisher* spin-off I might give that a go," adds Ennis. "I like Jon Bernthal. My attitude to *Punisher* movies and them using my stuff in films is that I did work for hire, and I gave up all control over how the material is exploited [when] I took the job. Marvel treated me decently, and I was even flown to the set of the Thomas Jane movie in Florida. Thomas was just right... but the film is a bit of a mess."



The Punisher's fortunes have reflected the times he lives in, and TV and film will continue to set their sights on Frank Castle.

No revenge story ends well, and amid the myriad incarnations of the Punisher there is once constant: Frank Castle isn't going to walk happily into the sunset, as Grant reveals a third, never realised *Punisher* story, in a proposed final mission for the Grant/Zeck duo and the Punisher alike.

"Mike Zeck and I pitched a bookend for our version. Marvel didn't want it. We're never going to do it, so I'll tell [you]... The Punisher is after a really bad guy who gets away to a Caribbean island where he can live out the rest of his days in luxury," reveals Grant.

"The Punisher can't go after the bad guy because he has bought off the police and army. Going after him is a pure suicide mission. The Punisher goes after him anyway and sneaks onto the island, finally gets to the guy and has his gun right in the guy's face, when the place floods with cops and military, all drawing laser beads on the Punisher. The bad guy smirks and says 'You lose.' The Punisher pulls the trigger as everyone else pulls the trigger. And he dies. But he also wins."

Daredevil Season Two begins in March on Netflix.

THE PUNISHER

A History Of Violence



THE PUNISHER'S GREATEST HITS

The best of Frank Castle

1 THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #129 (FEBRUARY 1974)



Writer Gerry Conway and artist, Ross Andru introduced the Punisher as an unwitting pawn

in a plot to kill Spider-Man. Graded copies of this legendary first appearance regularly sell for upwards of \$5,000.

2 THE PUNISHER: 'CIRCLE OF BLOOD' (1986)



Writer Steven Grant and artist Mike Zeck redefined the Punisher, elevating him from bit player

to star billing. 'Circle of Blood' sees him become involved with The Trust, an organisation who believes in his mission to clean up the streets.

3 THE PUNISHER (MARVEL KNIGHTS): 'WELCOME BACK FRANK' (2000)



In the first of many acclaimed outings, Garth Ennis, together with artist Steve Dillon, throw out the rule book

as Frank Castle takes on crime boss Ma Gnucci, a polar bear and endless mobsters in a fan-favourite run.

4 THE PUNISHER (2000 TO 2008)



Garth Ennis continued to dominate and define the character for almost a decade as he shifted

the character to Marvel's 'MAX' imprint. Look for 'Born' and 'Barracuda' as just two of the many highlights from Garth Ennis's take on the Punisher.

5 THE PUNISHER (2011)



Greg Rucka set the Punisher on a collision course with new criminal organisation The Exchange,

concluding in *Punisher: War Zone* by Greg Rucka et al.



ANT-CHRIST SUPERSTAR

THE OMEN IS ONE OF THE SCARIEST FILMS OF ALL TIME, BUT THIS NEW TV SERIES WILL PRESENT A VERY DIFFERENT DAMIEN THORN. SHOWRUNNER GLEN MAZZARA TALKS US THROUGH THE DEVILISHLY INVENTIVE NEW SERIES...

IT'S PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST INGENUOUS PREMISES FOR A HORROR FILM SERIES EVER DEvised: THE ANTICHRIST ARRIVES ON EARTH AS A NEWBORN, AND AS HE GROWS UP OVER

the course of a number of stories, he moves ever closer to the centre of power, in this case the office of the President of the United States. In the end he leads the world into Armageddon, fulfilling his destiny.

While things kicked off successfully with Richard Donner's *The Omen* (1976), they kind of faded with *Damien: Omen II* (1978) and *The Final Conflict* (1981), which became more an excuse for bloodshed than an exploration of Damien's role in humanity. Flash-forward 40 years from the first film's release, and he's getting another chance.

"I'm not really sure about the details of how those films were made," admits Glen Mazzara, executive producer/creator/showrunner of the TV series *Damien*. "What I'm excited about here is we have a character dealing with his destiny as the Antichrist. That's perfectly suited for a TV show. A lot of the stuff being done on TV is so grounded in character that I think it gives us a lot to play with. I'm sort of glad that they didn't do more in the films, because it leaves more for us to do."

Mazzara, previously of *The Walking Dead*, was actually approached by Fox with the notion of creating a show based on the character of Damien. A huge horror fan as well as a fan of the *Omen* films, he agreed to write it so long as he could do so his way.

"I didn't want to be beholden to the films' mythology," he details. "I wanted to take the first film as canon for our character and develop everything from the last shot of that film. I wanted to create a new character, or develop a new storyline and a different mythology. So we ended up spending a lot of time creating *Damien*, and as a result I feel like the story that unfolds has to stay true to that character instead of some larger mythology. It's really a character piece that plays as a thriller that has a lot of great horror, but people watch TV because it's cool characters doing cool stuff every week. It's about those characters that we care about, and that's why we watch them."

"When you start developing a show," Mazzara elaborates, "you're thinking about

these characters and the stories and how the characters are going to drive the story. Then you bring in the actors, and the way we work is I'll have a lot of conversations with the actors and say, 'What do you think about this character?' As you do your work, people call and respond to the material, and I've had a lot of stories that have been inspired from those conversations. I feel like it's all a process. What's really been exciting is working with Bradley [James] and Barbara [Hershey], and the way that relationship just felt so natural once we got it up on its feet."

James is best known for his time as Prince-turned-King Arthur on the BBC TV series *Merlin*, while Hershey is an award-winning actress best known for her roles in *Black*

"I think in the original movie," she proposes, "She was behind many of the things that happen, but you never knew it. It sort of makes sense when you see the present world of her influence then. She was always in the shadows, guiding and protecting and trying to shape what was happening. She's been with him his whole life without him knowing, and it isn't until this moment in time that she steps out of the shadows."

Offers James, "Of all the people for this burden to fall on, Damien is probably the guy you would want it to fall upon, and that's not necessarily because he's the best at this. It's just that he's a good representation of humanity's moral code; neither good nor

DAMIEN THROUGH THE YEARS The different faces of Thorn Jr

THE OMEN (1976)

Played by:
Harvey Spencer Stephens

The original child Antichrist is an expressionless, emotionless terror, manipulated by the despicable Mrs Baylock to fulfil his destiny.

DAMIEN: OMEN II (1978)

Played by:
Jonathan Scott-Taylor

Aided by his pet raven, the adolescent Damien continues to cause death wherever he goes, albeit unintentionally. He still doesn't realise he's evil yet.

Swan and most recently in ABC's *Once Upon A Time*. James has taken on the title role, while Hershey plays Ann Rutledge, who has shadowed Damien his entire life and is there to remind him who he really is so that he can embrace his ultimate destiny.

"From the child in *The Omen*, Damien has blanked out as far as what's happened to him up to this moment in time," says Hershey. "It's like Christ supposedly taking up the mantle when he was about 30, and was crucified when he was 33. Damien is now 30, so it's time. It's the moment. It would be as if someone said to you, 'You're the Antichrist'. What do you do with that information? And that's what the first season is really about. It's a really fascinating and interesting question. And the thing that's intriguing to me about my character is that it's completely complex. It is protective for sure, but it's a lot of other things. She's very powerful, so that automatically wields a certain kind of warpedness, but there are a lot of other things that hopefully aren't so obvious.

bad. Not just, you know, 'I'm Superman, I do everything that's good,' or, pick a villain, 'I do everything that's bad.' He *is* us. He is a representation of all of the people who go day to day. *That* is Damien."

Mazzara emphasises that the intrigue of telling his story in this medium is that there's an opportunity to see someone attempting to gain control of his life. "Things happen that he doesn't want," the writer muses. "Just like on shows that I've written on, like *The Shield*, the guys would end up doing something and things would go wrong and you have these moments of horror, but you also have a lot of nice character moments. What's been fun about taking that first film is it gave us a world, it gave us a tone and it gave us a lot to start with, and now you can say, 'Okay, let's revisit that world and freshen it up and visit it 25 years' – yes, we're fudging with the timeline – down the road. How does he live with it day-to-day, how do other people come into his life? What does it mean when something goes wrong for him?" >>>

WORDS
EDWARD
GROSS

MUST-SEE TV

Damien

➤ Most important for him and the rest of the writers was to fill in the back story of Damien over the last two and a half decades in order to create a full life story for the character.

"I would say Damien has been in denial of what he is," says Mazzara. "He's been running from the devil, and now when we meet him, time is up. He needs to begin his work for the devil; he needs to start to pull things together and embrace his destiny as the Antichrist. What we've done is create a character that desperately doesn't want to do that. He wants to retain his humanity, so there's real inner conflict here. What's nice about the original film is you do have these deaths and tragedies that are all somewhat plausible if you've heard about them, but clearly originating from some supernatural source. That supernatural source is, in a way, manipulating Damien and affecting his life, so no matter how far he tries to get out of its grip, that grip only becomes tighter."

Although the devil has already recently made his way back to television in the form of *Lucifer*, *Damien* is promising to be considerably darker, with a lead character that could be more controversial in that the writers are trying to make the Antichrist sympathetic to viewers.

Differs Mazzara, "It's a show that will, of course, have the usual tropes of any good classic horror, which are the scares, the thrills, the fun and all of that. But we're also examining issues of humanity, religion, human suffering, love – those larger questions. There's something that's really about choice, free will. There's a depth to the material that we can examine, because we have, hopefully, seasons ahead of us where we can dive in and have our characters wrestle with these questions."

"It's meant to be an entertaining piece," he notes, "but I think there's also a lot of thought behind it. We're taking those issues seriously. If people show up and enjoy it, that's great. If some people get upset because we're perhaps addressing religious matters in a particular way, I just try to focus on telling the best story possible and something that really is meaningful to me and the rest of the creative team. Any show you put out there, if you have a strong point of view, some people are going to disagree with it. I think it will be interesting to be able to talk about these matters in, hopefully, an intelligent way." ☞

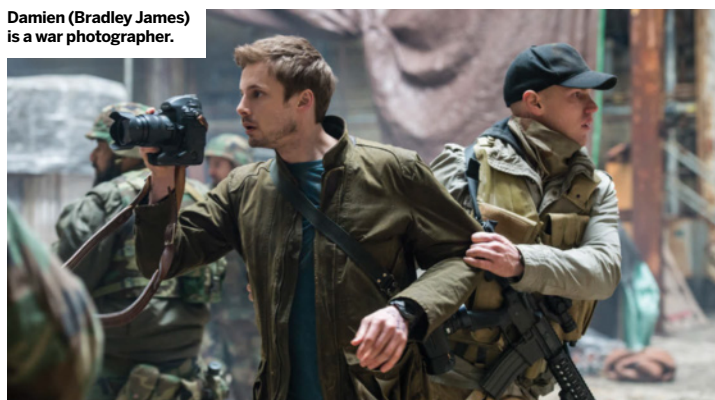
Damien is airing on Lifetime in the US, with a UK air date to follow.



Damien follows the life of the Antichrist, now aged 30.



Damien (Bradley James) is a war photographer.



OMEN III: THE FINAL CONFLICT (1981)

Played by: Sam Neill

The now 30-something Damien has fully embraced his heritage, even going so far as to order the deaths of all boys born on 24 March 1982.

OMEN IV: THE AWAKENING (1991)

Played by: N/A

Damien is absent from the film this time round. Instead, his long-lost daughter Delia (Asia Vieira) attempts to take on the mantle of evilom.

THE OMEN (2006)

Played by: Seamus Davey-Fitzpatrick

Sadly, this isn't a patch on the original, despite closely following its visual cues and a suitably game performance from the young lead.

"DAMIEN IS A REPRESENTATION OF ALL OF THE PEOPLE WHO GO DAY TO DAY"

BRADLEY JAMES

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WHICH BRINGS SOMETHING NEW
TO THE TEENS-IN-PERIL GENRE"

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Star Child

Jeff Nichols and Michael Shannon tell us about creating the most soulful sci-fi film you'll see this year

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL INTERVIEWS JAMES MOTTRAM

One of the recurring criticisms of modern sci-fi is that we've lost our sense of wonder. Postmodernism has ruined the genre; if you can't pop the balloon with a self-aware joke then no one will take you seriously. All the masses really want is to skip the spectacle. So when a film shows this isn't true, it makes our hearts sing.

While Jeff Nichols' *Midnight Special* uses genre classics like *Starman* and *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* as inspiration, there's no winking at the audience. There's no convoluted explanation about what's going on, who these people are, or why they're chasing after each other. Something incredible is happening. At the centre of the chaos and conspiracy is a real family. It's not just the plot that feels nostalgic; the whole film does.

"I was a kid of the Eighties!" laughs Nichols when we speak to him at Berlin Film Festival. "So from *Star Wars* to *ET* to *Close Encounters* to *Starman*, these are real, serious touchstones for me. And they were tremendous influences on the development of the film, for sure. There are obviously these aesthetic relationships. I like the way those films are lit. I like the texture of it. If you look at the blue lens flares and the inky blacks and just the aesthetic of those films, I think is really great. Even if you look at the beginning of *Close Encounters*... all the stuff in Richard Dreyfuss' house, the way his home looks... how crazy it all is. There's a toddler that is in the baby-holder banging a stick, and the kid is hitting the piano. The house feels very, very honest to me."

Midnight Special starts as it means to go on, with two men and a young boy readying to leave a motel room in a hurry. The local news reveals that one of them, Roy (Michael Shannon), is wanted by the police for the abduction of his son, Alton (Jaeden Lieberher). Few words are spoken, but the stakes are clearly high as they rush to the car and Roy's friend Lucas (Joel Edgerton) dons night-vision goggles and cuts the lights, storming down the Louisiana back roads. "That's how these things always go," remembers Nichols. "It begins with an image or an idea. In this case, it was two guys in a car moving very fast in the middle of the night down these back roads in the American South." After a pause, he adds, "Well, I knew there was probably a kid with superpowers in the backseat."

That kid is the subject of a manhunt that goes beyond the local law enforcement. The religious ranch Roy took him from, led by the boy's adopted father Calvin Meyer (Sam Shepherd), believe he belongs with them, and will do whatever it takes to get him back. If they weren't bad enough, the beat-up car is being tracked by a multitude of different government branches and personnel, including Dr Paul Sevier (Adam Driver). Everyone wants Alton because of his extraordinary abilities, but are they divine, are they alien, or are they something else? As Roy, Lucas and Alton's mother Sarah (Kirsten Dunst) race to get him to a certain location by a certain date, Alton's powers began to manifest more and more powerfully. ➤➤



➤ We all love John Carpenter's *Starman*, in which Jeff Bridges' alien is driven by a grieving widow (Karen Allen) to reach the place where his ship will come to pick him up, and Nichols assures us that he's well aware of the similarities. "It's the easiest one to draw direct parallels to," he acknowledges. "You've got the genre of sci-fi, but then you have a sub-genre inside that, which is a government chase film. Obviously, *Starman* is probably the easiest to say, 'That kind of lines up', but it's more the essence of all those films put together that is the real inspiration. It wasn't like I sat down and said, 'Okay, this is when the gas station is going to blow up' – although gas stations tend to blow up in all those films, and mine! But no, it wasn't a direct charting of one film to the other. It was more the sense of the things, how they felt."

"Jeff talks about that movie *Starman*, I've heard him bring it up in conversations about the movie," Shannon tells us. "I remember seeing *Starman* when I was a kid, and it had a profound effect on me – probably the first time I saw a movie that I thought, 'Wow, this is actually a really great movie.' The budding sensibility that I was acquiring as a young person. But being really, genuinely impressed with that movie, and Jeff Bridges' performance in it – thinking that was really special."

This is the fourth consecutive collaboration between Nichols and Shannon, with their fifth, a drama called *Loving*, already in the can. With *Shotgun Stories*, *Take Shelter* and *Mud*, Nichols has quietly established himself as one of the most exciting talents working in American cinema, and has given Shannon the platform for two of his most acclaimed performances. "I have a gentleman's agreement with Jeff that I want to be in all his movies," Shannon says. "He seems amenable to the idea. I don't think we've ever really had a fight. We just seem to get along pretty well. We'll see. We'll see how long we can keep it going."

Midnight Special sees Shannon deliver another barnstorming turn, albeit much more subdued than

his doomsday prophet in *Take Shelter*. The character of Roy is driven and intense, but he's a family man first and foremost who is prepared to do whatever it takes to protect his child. "He brought this up when we were doing *Take Shelter*," he recalls. "He said he had an idea for a chase movie: 'Just you and an old car going real fast.' That's about it. That was the pitch." When he got the script, that pitch had certainly evolved. "Oh yeah, I was delighted by it really. I thought it was going to be very exciting for fans of Jeff's work to see him make a movie like this. It felt like it was full of surprises. Not what you would expect from Jeff, necessarily."

While the subject matter may be a break from what we've come to expect from Nichols, it shouldn't be too much of a surprise to see the focus on family and the connections between the characters that compel them to stick together in the face of impossible odds. "I didn't quite know the relationships," he remembers. "And then you start fleshing it out and you're like, 'What is the movie about?' And that's when the relationship with my son started to dominate my life, so it obviously started to dominate my writing. I've always written on two tracks at once. One is this genre track, and that's all about the plot and the window dressing. But then the heart of the thing comes from some personal relationship in my life."

"If I talk to Mike about that in *Take Shelter*, that was before my son was born, and this was very much written after my son was out of the womb. It became a film not about two guys in a car moving through back roads in the American South at night. It became about my relationship with my son. If you take *Shotgun Stories*, *Take Shelter* and *Midnight Special*, it seems to be a trilogy of sorts, and it seems to be my development as an adult, as played by Mike Shannon! I'm very lucky that my alter ego is such a good actor."

With these two elements, Nichols began to work on creating a world that felt real. For a movie with this subject matter, it's incredible how grounded *Midnight Special* is, and small moments of tenderness and

The focus of the film is on the unique abilities of young Alton (Jaeden Lieberher).



Michael Shannon with co-star Joel Edgerton.



Director Jeff Nichols has worked with Shannon on all four of his films.

"I have a gentlemen's agreement with Jeff that I want to be in all his movies"
Michael Shannon

humour take on an extra weight. It's in the family interactions that Lucas witnesses from a distance, the look of fascinated bafflement on the face of Adam Driver's scientist as he hears testimony from commune members, and the conversation about whether or not Alton should be reading comic books. We care about what's happening because it feels so real. Every mistake counts. There's not much in the way of action, but it's fantastically involving.

"If you're going to pick a genre as potentially silly as a government chase film, you just have to ground it and make it as specific as you possibly can," explains Nichols. "Obviously, there are the specificity of the relationships, but also in just the way it plays out. I just didn't want it to be cheesy. You start to think about it from the point of view of your main characters, and how would this work and how would you handle this situation. You come up with what could be considered a pretty fantastical situation, but you execute it in a very pragmatic way, and that's what we've done here – or at least attempted to do."

"Well, yeah, that's one of the things I really appreciate about Jeff's work," enthuses Shannon. "It's secretly very lyrical and poetic. It seems very grounded in this very... I don't want to say cliché, >>

Anatomy Of Midnight Special

15% ET

A benign creature of unknown origin who must be protected from sinister government agencies? Yep.

5% Two-Lane Blacktop

Just a dash of Seventies chase movies.

20% Jeff Nichols

Families. Great acting. Minimal dialogue. Slow-burning. Maximum emotional impact with minimal visible effort. Michael Shannon.

20% Close Encounters Of The Third Kind

Real people struggling to deal with the reality of something truly incredible.

40% Starman

Someone with special powers in an extended race against time through the American South? Big time.

Midnight Special

Wanted Have you seen these fugitives?

➤ but what one thinks of as a down-to-earth American experience. Salt-of-the-earth, hardscrabble, the people of the Mid-West, the people of the South... they're not typically thought of in poetic terms. It's going back to that Faulkner-like tradition."

A huge part of this comes from casting choices. We've already talked about how good Shannon is as the father, while Edgerton does superb character work as the quiet Lucas; upright and capable, but hiding a big heart. Driver is great as the scientist fascinated by what he's chasing, and it's safe to say that his star has risen since his casting was first announced. Nichols tells us that the crew found out about Driver's big *Star Wars* news at the same time as the rest of us did. "Yeah... his first day at work was the day it was announced," he laughs. "And we were all like, 'Oh! That's going to change that guy's life! He's such an honest guy, I think he's an extraordinary actor.'"

Kirsten Dunst continues a brilliant run of form as Alton's mother Sarah, while the boy himself is played by the excellent Jaeden Lieberher "It never ceases to amaze me, the situations you find yourself in where you just have to establish intimacy with complete strangers," says Shannon. "But Jaeden is like... I'm trying to figure out a way to say it that doesn't sound

hokey or cliché. At the end of the day, he's a special kid. I've worked with kids a lot over the years, and usually with kids when they're good, it tends to be by accident. It's not like they know what they're doing or they even want to be there in the first place. They're just being themselves, and what they are is appropriate for what you need them to be. But Jaeden is very serious about what he does, and he's very focused. In a way it's like working with another grown-up. He's very generous. He doesn't complain."

There's no time for reams of exposition. These characters don't have the full picture, and neither do we, just as we didn't know what ET was or where he came from. "Well, there are no answers," Shannon tells us. "It's not like we secretly have the answers to the many questions that the film raises. I didn't need Jeff to explain it to me. I don't honestly think Roy knows what the hell's going on. All Roy knows is that he loves his son. That's basically all he knows. That's his whole motivation for everything he does in the movie. I don't think he has any defined perspective about any of it. But he knows that he has a son that means everything to him and he has to protect him no matter what." ✍

Midnight Special will be released in cinemas on 8 April.



Essentially, *Midnight Special* is a grounded chase movie.

Alton is pursued by government agent Paul (Adam Driver).



The director picks *Starman* as one of his more obvious inspirations.



River Tam (*Serenity*)

Wanted for: Psychically learning pretty much every government secret

Known accomplices: Simon Tam, Malcolm Reynolds

Transport: Firefly-class spaceship Serenity

Notes: Approach with caution. She might seem like she's off in a world of her own, but her martial arts skills are off the chain.



Starman (*Starman*)

Wanted for: Crash-landing his spacecraft into Earth and not immediately turning himself in

Known accomplices: Jenny Hayden

Transport: Orange and black 1977 Ford Mustang Cobra II Coupe

Notes: The extent of his powers is unknown. He brought a dead deer back to life, for one thing.



Space girl (*Lifeforce*)

Wanted for: Sucking the lifeforce out of a bunch of easily seduced male scientists

Known accomplices: N/A

Transport: Whoever will give her a lift, the body of Patrick Stewart.

Notes: She has a habit of wandering around naked and turning people into skeletal monsters.



Patrick Crump (*The X-Files*)

Wanted for: Murder, abducting a federal officer

Known accomplices: Possibly Fox Mulder

Transport: 1968 Plymouth Barracuda Fastback

Notes: Crump has taken Special Agent Mulder hostage, so be careful when approaching him. There's also the chance something in his ear might explode.



John Ryder (*The Hitcher*)

Wanted for: Lots and lots of murders

Known accomplices: Jim Halsey

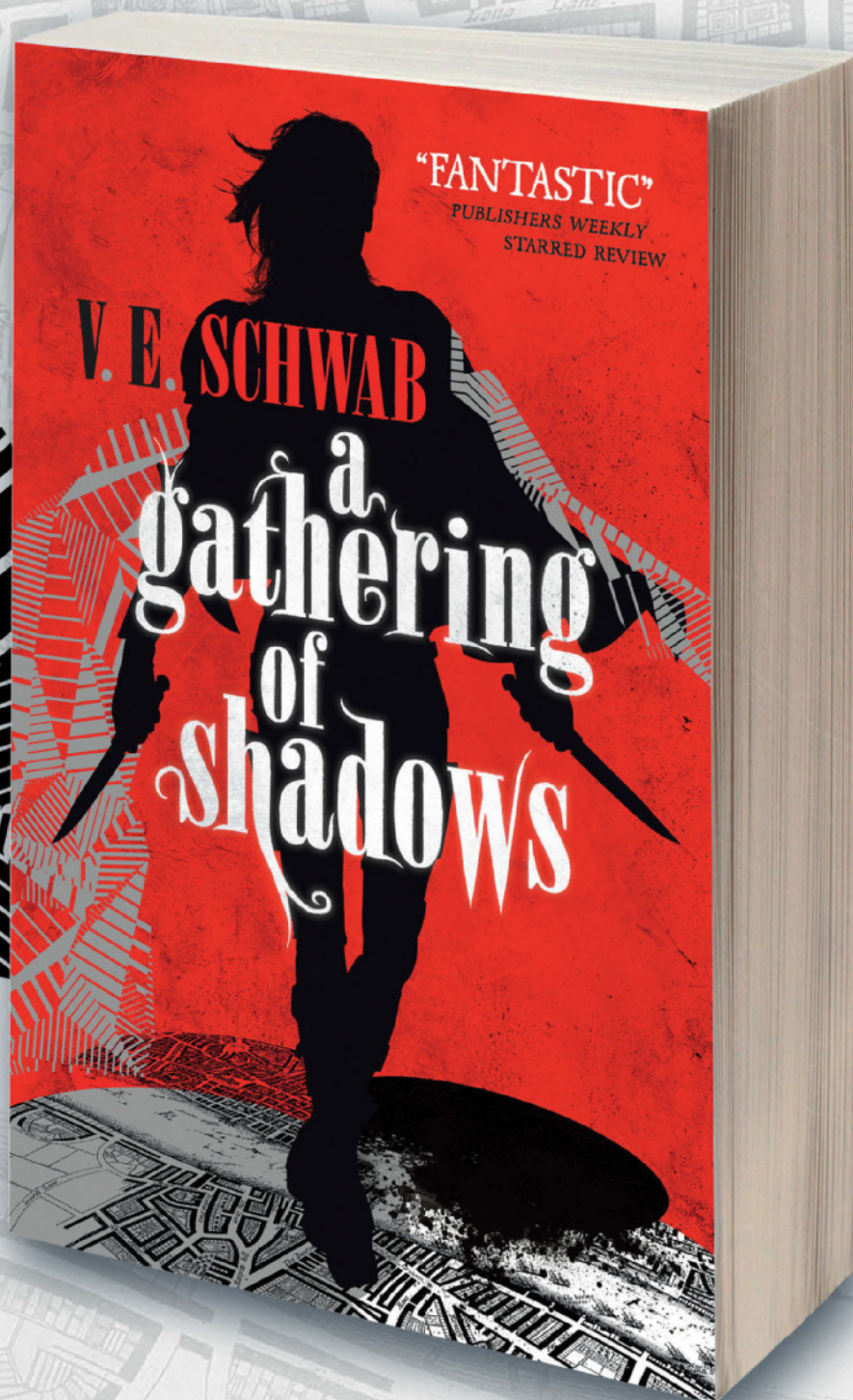
Transport: 1975 Cadillac Seville

Notes: Ryder is an extremely dangerous character. Catch him and he escapes. Escape from him and he catches up with you. One thing's certain: he won't stop.

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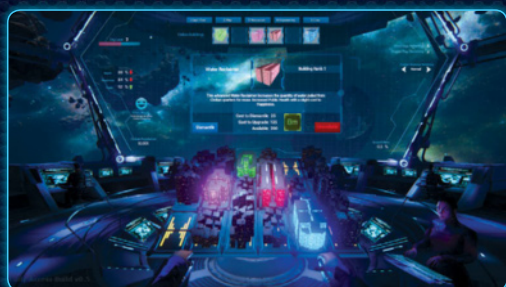
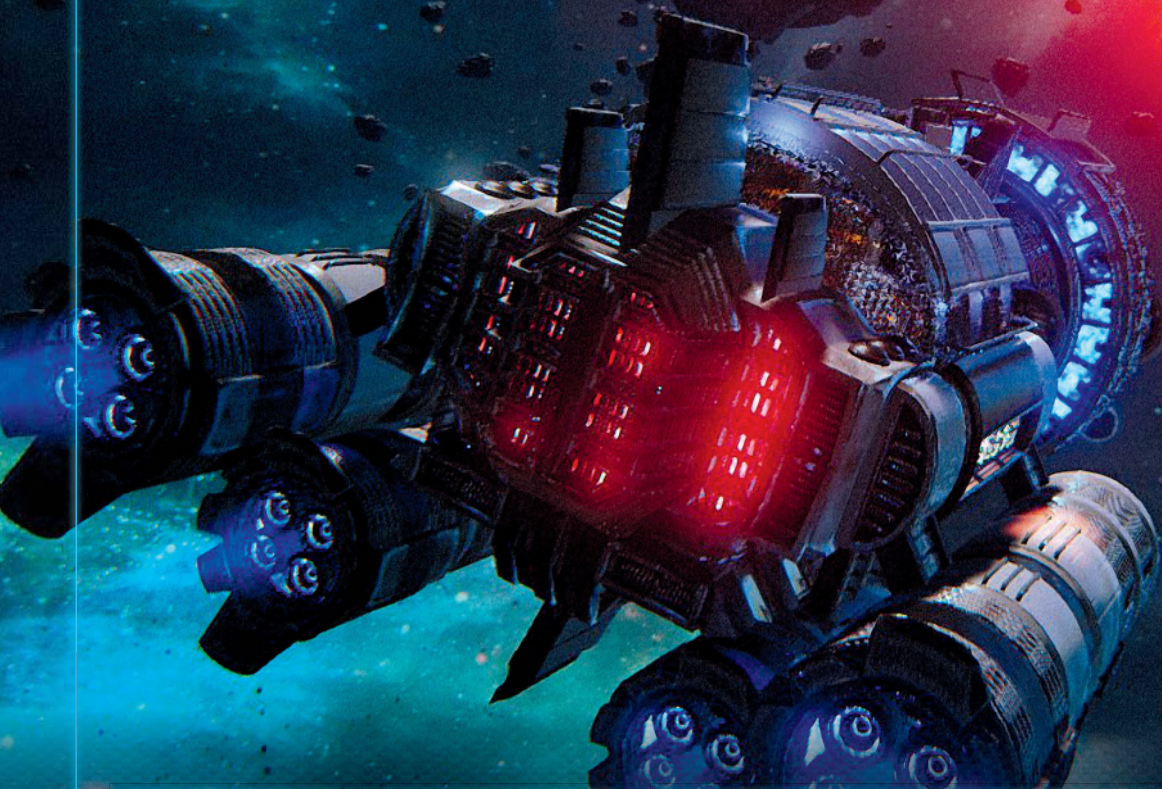
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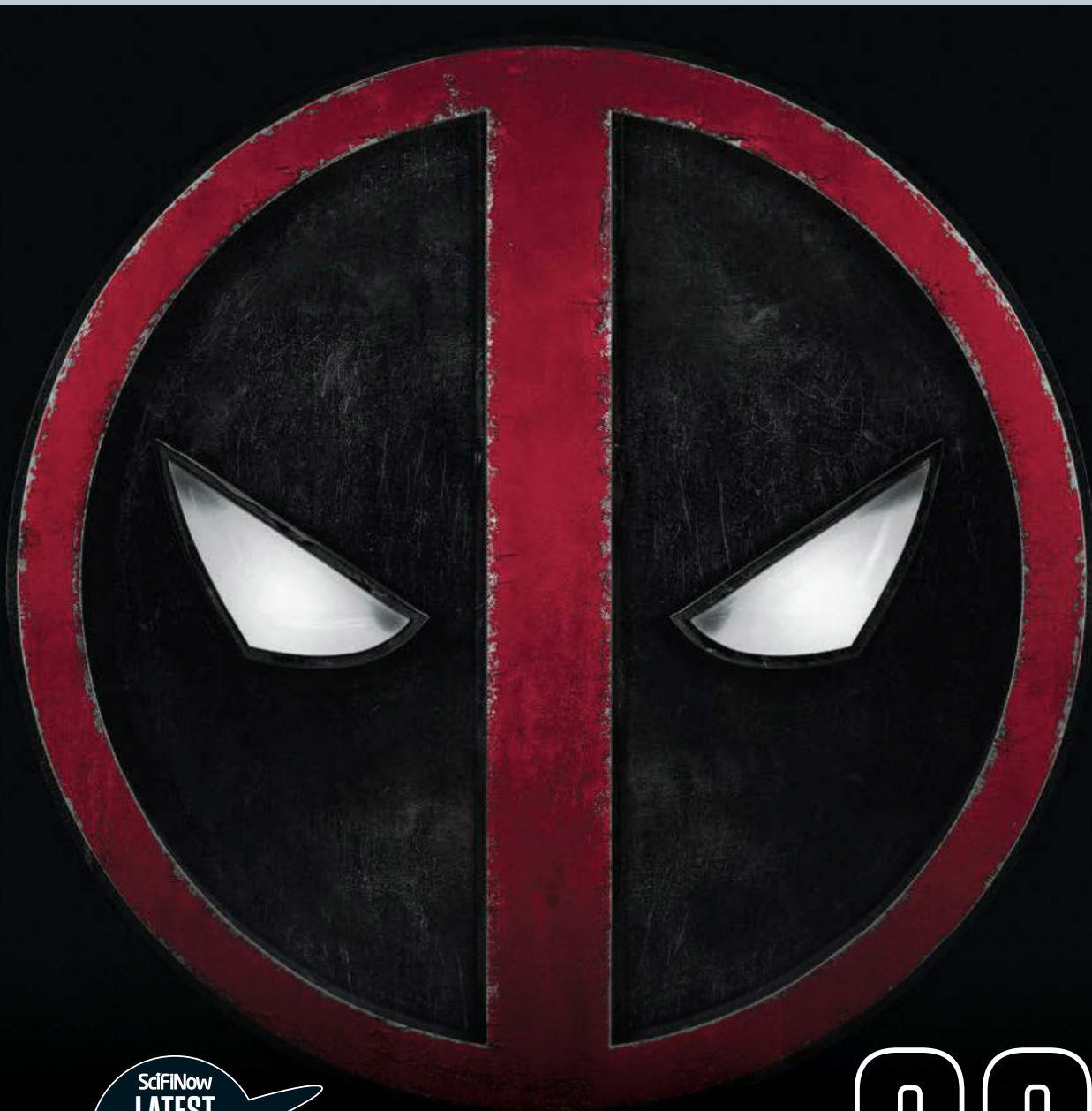
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SciFiNow Reviews

Our thoughts on the pick
of the entertainment
releases out this month



68 CINEMA

Theatrical releases

- 68 Deadpool
- 69 High-Rise
- 69 The Witch
- 70 The Survivalist
- 70 From The Other Side Of The Door
- 71 Goodnight Mommy
- 71 Midnight Special

72 HOME/FILM

Films on DVD, Blu-ray and more

- 72 The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2
- 72 The Last Witch Hunter
- 72 Nina Forever
- 74 The Green Inferno
- 74 Among The Living
- 74 The Visit: An Alien Encounter
- 75 Alienate
- 75 The Good Dinosaur
- 75 Tales That Witness Madness
- 76 A Frankenstein Story
- 76 Frankenstein
- 76 400 Days

78 HOME/TV

TV shows on DVD, Blu-ray and more

- 78 You Me And The Apocalypse
- 78 The Librarians: Season One
- 79 Supernatural: Season Ten
- 79 Doomwatch

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AWARD EXPLAINED THE 'MUST SEE NOW' AWARD GOES TO REVIEWS THAT SCORE EIGHT OR MORE...

SciFiNow
Must
see now!

68 DEADPOOL

"THE MOST UNSURPRISING ELEMENT IS
HOW WONDERFUL RYAN REYNOLDS IS"

TRIVIA NERF GUNNER WARHEAD HAS ONLY APPEARED 14 TIMES IN THE COMICS.

FILM INFO

Released

Out now

Certificate

15

Director

Tim Miller

Screenwriters

Rhett Reese, Paul Wernick

Cast

Ryan Reynolds, Morena Baccarin, Ed Skrein, TJ Miller, Gina Carano, Brianna Hildebrand, Stefan Kapicic, Leslie Uggams

Distributor

20th Century Fox

Running Time

108 mins



DEADPOOL

X-Men gonna give it to ya



WHAT A DOUCHE

The biggest arseholes of the superhero movie world



Tony Stark

Iron Man is occasionally a sweetie pie, and sometimes he is a hero, but more often than not he's just a bit of an arsehole without much basis as for why.



J Jonah Jameson

Enough with the shouting and the defaming! We know you're in charge, but you'd don't have to be such a dick about it. But it's also kind of hilarious, so do keep being a dick about it!



Magneo

He's up, he's down, he's left, he's right... it's hard to keep track of his many moods, a lot of which are a bit douchey. And he does a lot of bad – not just badass – things.



Eddie Blake

Watchmen's Comedian is a colossal dickhead, but not of the fun variety. He's violent, volatile and just a really terrible person.

After years of production and months of one of the most ambitious, in-your-face advertising campaigns the world of cinema has ever seen, if would have been a real anticlimax if *Deadpool* had been terrible. Or, even worse, if it had been kind of 'blah'. Thankfully, it's actually pretty good.

However, while it doesn't disappoint, it also doesn't defy expectations. It deviates from the regular 'superhero movie formula', but so did all the trailers. If you've seen them, you will already know what to expect from *Deadpool*, and not much surprises as a result. That isn't to say the story is predictable; it's just that nothing happens here that wouldn't happen in the comics.

One of the film's most unsurprising elements is how wonderful Ryan Reynolds is. Ever since that bit of test footage in 2014, it was almost a given that he would be brilliant, but it's good to have confirmation. He's doesn't truly transform into Deadpool until he puts the suit on, but his suitless Wade Wilson is also excellent, which is great because he spends quite a lot of the film out of it. He's sleazy but sweet, and awful but charismatic. He's not really an antihero like he's often described; he's more of a criminal who doesn't mind wreaking havoc, killing people and causing pain as long as his loved ones are safe and his face looks good. But Reynolds is only one of the stars in the sparkly *Deadpool* sky. TJ Miller (*Big Hero 6*), for example, is amazing as Wade's best friend Weasel. His deadpan delivery and blank expressions make it difficult to tell if Miller is secretly one of the best actors of his generation or if he just genuinely has no soul.

Something that *is* surprising is how little a few of the trailers' main players are actually in the film. Besides the final battle and a couple of tiddly scenes earlier on, neither

Colossus (Stefan Kapicic) nor Negasonic Teenage Warhead (Brianna Hildebrand) have much to do. *Deadpool* looked like it was going to redefine the genre in the sense that it seemed to feature a lot more women than we're used to from male-led, comic-book solo movies. Vanessa (Morena Baccarin), Negasonic, Angel Dust (Gina Carano) and Blind Al (Leslie Uggams) all appeared ready to step up to the forefront. As it turns out, only Vanessa, Wade's fiancée, has a storyline of her own. Blind Al is amusing, and mutant Negasonic has awesome powers, but neither of them really do anything. They're just there to flesh out the cast. Hopefully this will change for the sequel or, in an ideal world, Negasonic's future spin-off series. Think of the children, 20th Century Fox; the children would want this.

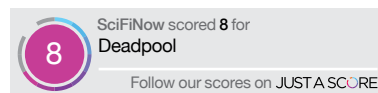
Aesthetically, *Deadpool* is stunning, or as stunning as a film of this sub-genre can be. There aren't any artistic, sweeping shots through the wilderness, but there are explosions, fire and oversized structures falling down all over the place. The fact that Deadpool has the ability to recover from disembowelment and grow back limbs also makes room for a lot of weird but beautiful creativity, especially in the cinematography. Seriously, watch out for that shit.

Most importantly, the film is bloody hilarious. The gags start during the opening credits (which are truly spectacular) and don't stop until the end. Occasionally, a joke will feel misplaced or misjudged – or it will be difficult to tell if you're just laughing because everyone else is – but on the whole they are relentless

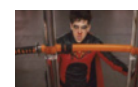
and infectious, covering the entire joke spectrum: satire, meta jokes, dick jokes, visual jokes – you name it, it's in there.

That all being said, there's not that much underneath the humour. The laughs come hard and often, but they're also pretty hollow. If it wasn't funny as hell, *Deadpool* probably wouldn't be that good. But who cares? The same was true of the comics, and if you like them, chances are you're going to love this.

Poppy-Jay Palmer



OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Kick-Ass
There's a lot of cussing, blood and violence in Matthew Vaughn's first venture into comic-book adaptations.



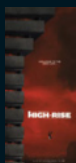


HIGH-RISE

Outside of society

SciFiNow
Must
see now!

Details 15 // 112 mins // 18 March **Director** Ben Wheatley **Screenwriter** Amy Jump **Cast** Tom Hiddleston, Sienna Miller, Jeremy Irons, Luke Evans, Elisabeth Moss **Distributor** StudioCanal



Kill List duo Ben Wheatley and Amy Jump's adaptation of JG Ballard's horrific, darkly comic tower-block tale has proven to be divisive. But while

many seem to have taken against *High-Rise*, we felt quite the opposite.

Tom Hiddleston plays Dr Robert Laing, a new resident in the first of five new tower blocks created by visionary architect Anthony Royal (Jeremy Irons). The wealthy live in luxury at the top, with the less well-off families at the bottom. Clashes at the swimming pool and arguments over power failures lead to lines being drawn, and human society breaks down.

This is a savage satire rather than a comic horror; often bombastic, very stylish, and with a fantastically oppressive atmosphere. As Keeley Hawes' Ann Royal rides a horse on the roof terrace and the children are denied access to the pool, the social commentary is as subtle as a brick, but certainly makes an impact.

The casting is perfect. Sienna Miller, Luke Evans, Elisabeth Moss and Dan Skinner stand out, and it's nice to see Irons on form. Meanwhile, Hiddleston's Laing drifts, unable or unwilling to fit in anywhere. It's a tricky performance, and Hiddleston

does a superb job, using his looks and charm to create a superficially appealing character, and twisting it to make him scarily unreadable.

The shift into savagery happens gradually, then very suddenly, much of the change shown in a montage set to a morose cover of ABBA's 'SOS' by Portishead. It's heavily stylised, and Wheatley encourages the actors to play up the revolting and the ridiculous, resulting in more comedic moments than viewers may be expecting, but he beautifully conjures the ever-more toxic atmosphere of an uneven society gone violently to rot. The 'catalyst for change' is a pressure cooker from which no one can escape.

High-Rise is not without its flaws or missed opportunities, and it will alienate as many as it engages, but this gruesome, scabrously funny and bold adaptation is most definitely worth taking a chance on.

Jonathan Hatfull



OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Shivers
For tower-block terrors with a body-horror emphasis, check out David Cronenberg's incredible nightmare.



SciFiNow
Must
see now!

THE WITCH

Open up and let the devil in

Details 15 // 90 mins // 11 March **Director** Robert Eggers **Screenwriter** Robert Eggers **Cast** Anya Taylor-Joy, Ralph Ineson, Kate Dickie, Harvey Scrimshaw **Distributor** Universal



Over the last couple of years, the hushed 'best horror of the year' rumbling was reserved for *It Follows* and *The Babadook*. This year, it's the turn of Robert Eggers' debut, a beautifully made horror about a family in 1630s New England struggling in the face of seemingly endless and increasingly violent misfortune.

Devout Puritan William (Ralph Ineson) takes his family away to the edge of the woods, far from the corrupting influence of their fellow pilgrims, but shortly after their arrival a devastating accident occurs. As the family struggles to move past the loss, their efforts to survive only seem to result in more misery. Is this the harsh reality of frontier life, or is there something more sinister at play?

Based on real accounts of witchcraft, there's a grim authenticity to the film, which combined with its sincerity gives it real power. Eggers' construction of his chosen time and place is stunning, the dialogue, set design, decoration and costuming are painstakingly detailed and utterly

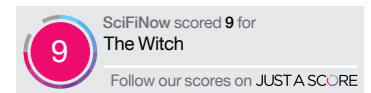
convincing, combining with Jarin Blaschke's stark cinematography and Mark Korven's unnerving score to plunge the viewer into this wintry and deeply foreboding landscape.

This crucible is a grim and punishingly difficult environment, but as much as the characters fear the presence of evil, it's the fear of God that creates the real sense of dread in the film. This combination works beautifully, and for the most part Eggers relies on atmosphere, but when the scares do arrive they hit hard.

The work of the cast is top notch. Ineson balances religious fervour with a surprisingly warm heart, playing a man who loves his family, and views their situation as a trial they must endure. Dickie delivers yet another superb turn, and Taylor-Joy gives a star-making performance as a girl on the verge of womanhood who finds herself the subject of terrifying accusations and with no one to defend her.

This is an intricately made, brilliantly performed and utterly chilling horror about the dark side of faith, and an absolutely fantastic debut from Eggers.

Jonathan Hatfull



OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



The Blood On Satan's Claw
A 17th century English village falls under the spell of devil worshippers.



THE SURVIVALIST

End of the world as we know it...

Details 18 // 105 mins // Out now **Director** Stephen Fingleton **Screenwriter** Stephen Fingleton **Cast** Mia Goth, Martin McCann, Olwen Fouere **Distributor** Bulldog



A suspenseful, thoughtful and brutal post-apocalyptic thriller from Stephen Fingleton marks him out as one to watch. In the same way

that *Threads* took a realist approach to depicting the end of civilisation, so does Fingleton, who takes great care in creating a world where nature still flourishes, but industry has collapsed. He superbly evokes a desperate mood in a future where money is no longer significant and nourishment is currency.

We meet a lone man (Martin McCann) who resides in a cabin going through his daily routine until he is interrupted by a mother and daughter, Kathryn (Olwen Fouere) and Milja (Mia Goth), who attempt to negotiate a deal with him to gain access to his crops.

Fingleton uses both sound and silence to great effect to create a haunting and tense ambience, and places his actors in tight spaces and then expansive countryside to elicit the sensation of their small part in the bigger scheme of things. The camera

closes in on his characters and then wildly swoops upwards, making this both suffocating and striking viewing. It also inserts surreal and haunting flourishes through deft camerawork and trickery. The sounds of the natural world trickle while the dialogue remains spare. At times its pared-down styling is reminiscent of Scott Graham's *Shell*, which was another impressive debut feature.

Strong physical performances across the board from Goth, Fouere and McCann add to the intensity with their interactions proving to be particularly menacing. Their distrust in one another and the sense of paranoia is often palpable with occasional bursts of violence erupting, making for an edgy and jumpy experience.

Fingleton delivers an atmospheric and bold debut that poses smart, provocative questions about the way in which the world is changing, and the way in which peak oil theory could turn into reality. It speaks volumes through its silence and lingers in the memory for a long while after watching.

Katherine McLaughlin

SciFiNow scored 7 for The Survivalist

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



The Road
A bleak and stirring post-apocalyptic adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's novel from John Hillcoat.



THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

Knock knock

Details 15 // 96 mins // Out now **Director** Johannes Roberts **Screenwriter** Johannes Roberts, Ernest Riera **Cast** Sarah Wayne Callies, Jeremy Sisto, Sofia Rosinsky, Suchitra Pillai-Malik **Distributor** 20th Century Fox



Any cinema goer will know that Sarah Wayne Callies' (*The Walking Dead*) grieving mother should follow instructions given to

her by her housemaid, and they'll also know that she won't.

Callies plays Maria, an expat living with her antique-dealer husband Michael (Jeremy Sisto) and their young daughter Lucy (Sofia Rosinsky) in India, and she's struggling and failing to live with the grief and guilt following the death of her son Oliver (Logan Creran). After she tries to do something drastic, Piki tells her that if she goes to a certain temple she'll be able to speak to her son again. There's just one hard and fast rule: don't open the door.

The essential setup is shop-worn but director Johannes Roberts (*F*) makes the most of his Indian setting. There are a couple of instances where it threatens to veer into 'exotic mysticism', but for the most part the focus is squarely on Maria and the

consequences she faces for opening the bloody door.

Callies has always felt like an actor in need of a good showcase, and it's great to see her step into a leading role. It doesn't flinch from showing the extent of her guilt and depression, and Callies definitely rises to the challenge, keeping us invested in Maria's struggle and making sure that we're still on her side once she starts making some questionable decisions around the halfway point. Sisto (*Six Feet Under*) gives solid support as her husband, but it's really her show.

As it progresses onto the consequences, we enter familiar territory, but Roberts shows he's capable of constructing a good scare outside of claustrophobic confines of a school building or a storage unit, with some of the most unnerving sequences coming during the bright light of day. It putters along through the story notes that you'd expect, but strong performances and direction make for a solid ghost story.

Jonathan Hatfull



SciFiNow scored 6 for The Other Side Of The Door

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...

The Orphanage
A grieving mother attempts to locate her missing child in an old orphanage in this brilliant Spanish thriller.



GOODNIGHT MOMMY

Little monsters

SCIFINOW
Must see now!

Details 18 TBC // 99 mins // Out now **Directors** Severin Fiala, Veronika Franz
Screenwriters Severin Fiala, Veronika Franz **Cast** Lukas Schwarz, Elias Schwarz, Susanne Wuest **Distributor** Vertigo Releasing



Following positive word from festivals and posters that promise nightmares, we've been excited about Austrian horror *Goodnight Mommy*

for a while now. Having seen it, we can tell you that it's just as gripping and upsetting as you'd been led to believe.

Newcomers Lukas and Elias Schwarz play identical twins Lukas and Elias, who have been alone at their idyllic forest house while their mother (Susanne Wuest) has been in the hospital. When she returns swathed in bandages, they're unsettled. She seems colder, crueller and more ill-tempered. Is this really the same woman who went away?

Filmmaking duo Severin Fiala and Veronika Franz have delivered something very impressive. It's atmospheric, as the cool, unpredictable feel inside the house contrasts with the summer heat. Glimpses of jars teeming with cockroaches and eerie walks in the woods are jarring when placed next to moments of fraternal affection between the boys, while the mother watches from behind her bandages. There's one very obvious division in this triangle that's hinted at early and often, but the film doesn't suffer.

Although much of the conversation will be about how it's hard to watch, Fiala and Franz aren't limited to shock value. With its young characters coming to a conclusion that feels logical to them and taking horrifying action, *Goodnight Mommy* owes as much to dark fairy-tale films like *The Reflecting Skin* as it does to *Funny Games*. With its dark caves, endless trees and burning fields, the location is loaded with symbolism and the filmmakers expertly add it to their palette.

The deliberate pacing and moments of cruelty might give the impression of a cold-hearted film, but the significance of what the children are doing and how this situation has been able to manifest is as frightening as the glimpses of visceral bloodshed. This is a potent and disturbing nightmare, with flawless performances and a rich imagination behind its grim façade.

Jonathan Hatfull

SciFiNow scored 8 for
Goodnight Mommy
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



A Tale Of Two Sisters
A girl returns home from an institution and suspects her stepmother of wickedness in this terrifying horror.



SCIFINOW
Must see now!

MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

Shine a light

Details 15 // 111 mins // 4 April **Director** Jeff Nichols **Screenwriter** Jeff Nichols
Cast Michael Shannon, Jaeden Lieberher, Joel Edgerton, Kirsten Dunst, Adam Driver, Sam Shepard **Distributor** Entertainment One



Following Shotgun Stories, Take Shelter and Mud, writer-director Jeff

Nichols continues his incredible run of form with this smart and sensitive homage to Eighties sci-fi classics. With so many filmmakers merrily lifting from the gloomier work of John Carpenter, it's refreshing to see a movie latch on to *Starman*'s sense of wonder, as well as its chase-movie structure.

The target of this manhunt is Alton Meyer (Jaeden Lieberher), a child with special powers who has been abducted by his father Roy (Michael Shannon) from the religious commune that has been treating him as a miracle. Roy needs to get him to a certain location in three days, but can they evade the fanatics and government forces while keeping Alton alive?

As much as *Midnight Special* lifts from Carpenter and Spielberg, it's absolutely a Jeff Nichols film. He displays incredible confidence as the film jumps right in, trusting the viewer to keep up. That lack of condescension is both bracing and refreshing, as Nichols relies upon his cast to convey

the characters' histories with glances and gestures while keeping the plot moving. It's all so grounded that it's almost easy to forget how invested you've become in their journey, until Nichols puts them in jeopardy.

A big part of that is obviously due to the performances. Shannon is superb as the driven father, channelling that unpredictable intensity into a desperate protectiveness, while Joel Edgerton quietly steals the film as Roy's deceptively big-hearted driver/muscle. Kirsten Dunst doesn't appear until roughly halfway, but completes the family unit beautifully, and Adam Driver brings a nice sense of humour and awe to his NSA scientist.

Nichols embraces the structural simplicity of the road movie, with the pursuing forces and Alton's health acting as the ticking clock. Teasing hints are dropped about Alton's powers, and the fragments of it we witness are incredible. Somehow Nichols has managed to combine that Spielbergian feel of something magical we'll never quite understand with a family story that is utterly involving and moving.

Jonathan Hatfull

SciFiNow scored 9 for
Midnight Special
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Starman
Jeff Bridges and Karen Allen are superb in one of John Carpenter's most underappreciated films.



THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY – PART 2

Game over

Details 12 // 137 mins // 2015 // **Released** 21 March **Director** Francis Lawrence **Cast** Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth, Sam Claflin, Natalie Dormer, Woody Harrelson **Distributor** Lions Gate Home Entertainment



As far as film series go, *The Hunger Games* is a strange beast. After the plodding first movie, *Catching Fire* upped the ante, and *Mockingjay – Part 1* evolved into something weightier – and most importantly, better – altogether. But can *Part 2* continue this upward spiral?

Yes and no, as it turns out. The truth is that the bulk of films with two parts are unnecessarily stretched out to fill the running time – one is usually enough, and you get the feeling in the case of *Mockingjay* that a single film might have sufficed. Even so, this is covered up by the bulk of the performances, with the majority of the cast going far beyond the call of duty. The level of commitment is real and pronounced, and while other YA dystopias look suspiciously clean and shiny, there's nothing nice about this world; no one is having a good time.

At the centre of it all is Jennifer Lawrence's Katniss Everdeen, who stands apart from near enough every one of her YA counterparts. While others are well adjusted in spite of their circumstances, Katniss is already

damaged beyond repair, and the series' main focus is her attempts to come to terms with this while continuing to survive. When she's on the screen, it's almost as if no one else matters – as good as they are, Josh Hutcherson and Liam Hemsworth's supporting players are mere window dressing.

After the calm of the first-act wedding follows the inevitable storm, which duly engulfs the rest of the film, punctuated by extended cameos from practiced scene stealers like Woody Harrelson, Elizabeth Banks and Donald Sutherland. The pacing may not always be there, but at no point do you ever feel that anyone's safe – and duly a number of major characters are bid farewell to. In a world like this, the best we can hope for is a bittersweet ending, but even this manages to question what has been lost as much as what has been one.

As ever, some will find fault with what was cut from the source material and what was changed, but in all honesty it's hard to imagine how the filmmakers could have done a better job with this. If nothing else, the *Hunger Games* series has set a benchmark, and it's up to its successors to follow this up.

Steve Wright

SciFiNow scored 8 for
The Hunger Games:
Mockingjay – Part 2

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



The Maze Runner
Another YA novel adaptation series that seems to revel in sending kids to Hell and back.

THE LAST WITCH HUNTER

In for the Vin

Details 15 // 102 mins // 2015 // **Released** Out now **Director** Breck Eisner **Cast** Vin Diesel, Michael Caine, Rose Leslie, Elijah Wood **Distributor** Entertainment One



One of the unlikelyst passion projects of all time, *The Last Witch Hunter* sees Vin Diesel enter full-on *Dungeons & Dragons* mode as Kaulder, an immortal warrior who finds himself combating a magic-based threat in the modern day.

It isn't the easiest film to follow, but luckily the cast do a great job of selling the stakes to us. Diesel's protagonist possesses undeniable charm;

Michael Caine does well in an underwritten role; Rose Leslie (*Game Of Thrones*) is winningly likeable as always, and Elijah Wood proves to be an unexpected scene-stealer.

Even with all this working in its favour, it's far from perfect. Outside the four main characters, very few of the cast are sketched out, and very rarely do you get a true sense of what's driving Kaulder – his family, supposedly his motivation, are seldom seen.

Still, in an era where fantasy like this on the big screen is hard to come by, something like this is always worth watching, especially when it's so nakedly endearing.

Steve Wright



SciFiNow scored 7 for
The Last Witch Hunter

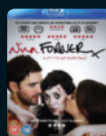
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NINA FOREVER

Dead and loving it



Details 18 // 99 mins // 2015 // **Released** Out now **Directors** Ben Blaine, Chris Blaine **Cast** Fiona O'Shaughnessy, Cian Barry, Abigail Hardingham, David Troughton, Elizabeth Elvin **Distributor** StudioCanal



Of all the oddball horror-movie ideas to come about in recent years, *Nina Forever's* premise has to be up there: namely that of the deceased protagonist (Fiona O'Shaughnessy) who resurfaces whenever her former boyfriend Rob (Cian Barry) gets intimate with the new girl on the scene, Holly (Abigail Hardingham).

As well as being inventive and gory, *Nina Forever* is hilarious,

gleefully revelling in its bizarre plot while avoiding plummeting into self-parody. The performances from the three leads are on point (particularly O'Shaughnessy, who can't have had the best time considering that she's in the buff and covered in fake blood in all her scenes), as they all attempt to come to terms with the strange state of play that has come about, all the while never losing sight of just how ridiculous the situation is.

Not only has *Nina Forever* announced the arrival of the Blaine brothers on the feature-film directors circuit; it is also one of the best horror movies in recent years, fully deserving the acclaim it has garnered on the way.

Steve Wright



SciFiNow scored 9 for
Nina Forever

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

WIN! A 10 CLOVERFIELD LANE SURVIVAL KIT

To celebrate the release of *10 Cloverfield Lane*, in UK cinemas 18 March (cert TBC), we are offering you the chance to win one of ten flashlights and survival kits.

Produced by JJ Abrams, directed by Dan Trachtenberg and starring Mary Elizabeth Winstead, John Goodman and John Gallagher Jr, *10 Cloverfield Lane* will show that monsters come in many forms.

For a chance to win this prize, just answer the following question:

WHO DIRECTED THE ORIGINAL CLOVERFIELD MOVIE?

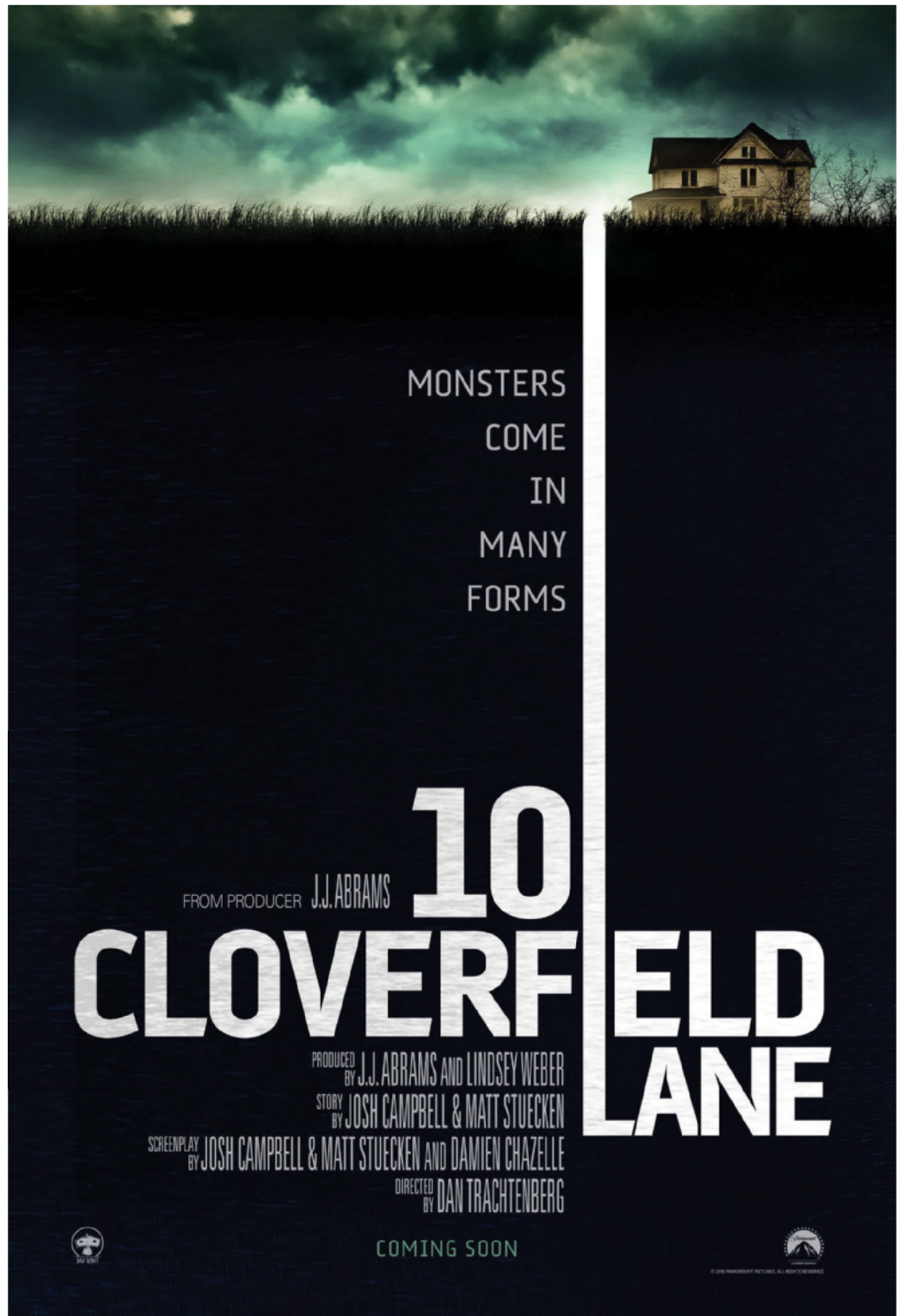
- a) Rupert Wyatt
- b) Matt Reeves
- c) Duncan Jones



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THE GREEN INFERNO

Will put you off your dinner

Details 18 // 100 mins // 2013 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Director** Eli Roth
Cast Lorenza Izzo, Ariel Levy, Daryl Sabara, Kirby Bliss Blanton, Aaron Burns
Distributor Entertainment One



So, Eli Roth's cannibal horror *The Green Inferno* has finally overcome the horrors of whatever distribution problems it was having. It's been such a long wait that Roth made and released a film in the interim (silly but fun Keanu Reeves thriller *Knock Knock*). We caught the movie at its FrightFest screening back in 2014, and to be honest, we didn't find that it was worth the wait.

American student Justine (Lorenza Izzo) knows that she wants to become an activist, but she's having trouble finding the right cause. When she meets a group that is dedicated to saving Amazon rainforest, she jumps at the chance. But after a horrific turn of events lands the students in the hands of the tribe they wanted to protect, Justine will realise that she's made a terrible mistake.

The film makes its case very early on that these students who are willing to jump into any cause are going to get punished for it. "Don't think," Jonah (Aaron Burns) tells Justine. "Act." That kind of attitude is what leads them to travel to the jungle without learning

to speak the language or doing any preparation of any kind beyond bringing bug spray. Roth's glee is so obvious that the sly dark comedy tone makes sense in the first half hour.

So when the characters find themselves being torn limb from limb, getting eaten alive and facing the kind of atrocities that they were appalled by in class, that tone feels out of place, but not as much as the gross-out moments. The blend of shock and shit jokes feels crass rather than anything else, and Roth can't seem to decide exactly what reaction he wants. Do we laugh, are we shocked, or do we feel their pain? Maybe he's going for all three, but this tonal confusion might be the reason why the second half feels so devoid of tension.

It's also curiously lacking in atmosphere, which is odd given how handsomely made the *Hostel* movies were. Horrible things happen, but it's curiously uninvolved as we wait for Justine to be sacrificed or saved. There are some sharp moments and some truly gruelling ones, but this is a disappointment.

Jonathan Hatfull

SciFiNow scored **3** for *The Green Inferno*
 Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Cannibal Holocaust
 The original cannibal horror retains all its power to shock, and it's got a brain behind it too.

AMONG THE LIVING



Dead rising

Details 18 // 90 mins // 2015 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Directors** Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury **Cast** Anne Marivin, Théo Fernandez, Francis Renaud, Zacharie Chasseriaud, Damien Ferdel **Distributor** Metrodome



Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury are two of the most exciting up-and-comers in horror cinema, so it's good to see them build on their promise shown in the likes of *Inside* and *Livid* with *Among The Living*, a tale of high-school hijinks gone wrong that gets progressively more horrific.

Zig-zagging between Joe Dante suburbia parable and Wes Cravenesque social commentary in such an effortless manner that it seems the two were always intended to

fit together, the secret uncovered by a trio of kids in a dilapidated house threatens to destroy not only them, but their family as well. This lack of discrimination functions in the film's favour, keeping you in the dark regarding the stakes until well into the final third – by which time the body (and blood) count has already been ratcheted up to satisfyingly macabre levels.

As well as introducing one of the most disturbing on-screen bogeyman in recent years (think the Pale Man crossed with *Leatherface* – coincidentally the subject of the Bustillo and Maury's next feature), *Among The Living* is a genuinely terrifying, if all too brief, slasher flick.

Steve Wright



SciFiNow scored **8** for *Among The Living*
 Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)

THE VISIT: AN ALIEN ENCOUNTER

Very terrestrial

Details PG // 83 mins // 2015 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Director** Michael Madsen
Distributor Metrodome



If *The Visit: An Alien Encounter* had been an actual documentary, then it would have been mind-blowing. But it's not, so it isn't. Instead, it's a 'simulation' that asks how Earth's leaders would respond to an extra-terrestrial arrival.

Director Michael Madsen (no, not *that* Michael Madsen) takes an interesting approach to the subject: he actually speaks to genuine scientists and crisis experts in order to get a clear idea of just what would happen in the event of extraterrestrials landing on our planet.

It's almost a satire, but it's not witty or cutting. It's almost a documentary, but it's not real. It's

difficult to describe what it is exactly, besides 'documentary-style', and that in turn makes it difficult to figure out what to think of it. It certainly provides food for thought, but it's more the type of thing you'd discuss in a start-of-term, ice-breaker seminar or with your friends over pizza than the type of thing you'd actually watch a film about.

Ultimately it's all hypothetical, so really it's hard to let go of the fact that nothing anyone says during the run time really matters all that much in the end.

Poppy-Jay Palmer

SciFiNow scored **5** for *The Visit: An Alien Encounter*
 Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)

ALIENATE

Nothing to see here

Details 15 // 90 mins // 2016 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Director** Michael Shumway
Cast Blake Webb, Tatum Langton, Jaclyn Hales **Distributor** Altitude

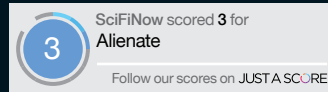


The promotional material for *Alienate* describes fusing the suspense of Gareth Edwards' *Monsters* with the intelligent alien assault of *Independence Day*. While this sounds like a winning formula, unfortunately the similarities are purely superficial, and the end product rather bland.

While the cover art teases an epic battle for the fate of Earth, what's actually in the film is another matter entirely. The unconvincingly photogenic young cast attempt to survive in the wake of an alien invasion, despite the fact that Earth doesn't look like it's just been invaded. Although most of the film concerns the uninteresting human dilemmas taking place before and during the invasion, which, frankly, is a disappointment considering the amount of promise.

The budget is clearly minimal to the point of non-existent, but the key to good filmmaking is to disguise the lack of capital – not highlight it by veering the camera away at every opportunity whenever something exciting threatens to occur. Most unforgivably, it's simply boring, there is very little here to keep you gripped. The best part is the DVD case...

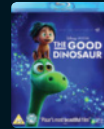
Steve Wright



THE GOOD DINOSAUR

Arlo can you go?

Details PG // 101 mins // 2015 // **DVD** // **Released** 21 March **Director** Bob Peterson **Cast** Raymond Ochoa, Jeffrey Wright, Frances McDormand, Steve Zahn
Distributor Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures



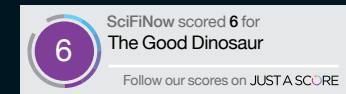
When a young dinosaur named Arlo is separated from his film and gets lost out in the wilderness, he's forced to overcome his fears in order to find the path back home. On the way he meets a variety of colourful creatures, including a human boy called Spot, who quickly goes from a pesky pest to his best friend.

Honestly, *The Good Dinosaur* is worth watching for the animation alone. The hyper-realistic backgrounds continue to be

brehtaking up to the point where it's difficult to believe it's not just real life. But it's not just visually beautiful; the story is warm, engaging and often genuinely funny, and it frequently but gracefully meanders between joyous and devastating. It's an emotional rollercoaster.

Unfortunately, its timing was a little off, being released only a couple of months after *Inside Out*, the greatest emotional rollercoaster of them all. Though it's lovely and wonderful in so many ways, *The Good Dinosaur* is predictably overshadowed by the Pixar film that came before it. It's sad, but it happens.

Poppy-Jay Palmer



TALES THAT WITNESS MADNESS

Enough to drive you mad...

Details 15 // 90 mins // 1973 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Director** Freddie Francis
Cast Kim Novak, Joan Collins, Donald Pleasence, Peter McEnery, Mary Tamm
Distributor Fabulous Films



Springing from the golden era of British anthology horrors, *Tales That Witness Madness* doesn't match the very best that the craze had to offer, but there's some fun to be had. It sticks to the template: a group of connected strangers, a motley crew of character actors, and one stand-out story makes the bits that don't work worthwhile.

Psychiatrist Donald Pleasence invites his colleague (Jack Hawkins) to view lunatics in his asylum. He has evidence of what drove them mad, but the stories need to be heard to be believed.

As with any anthology horror, this is definitely hit and miss. The best comes first, as the lonely son of a wealthy couple constantly at each other's throats starts talking to, and feeding, an imaginary friend: a tiger. It plays out like Stephen King's excellent 'Here There

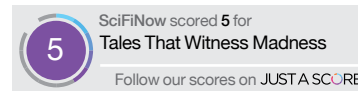
Be Tygers', and manages to be funny, unpredictable and creepy, building to a pleasantly nasty conclusion.

Fairbank's screenplay does have a lot of fun dangling the inevitable horrible ending to each story over the viewer, and there's an endearing weirdness to them all. How often do you see a film with a haunted penny-farthing that's also a time-travel device? McEnery's antique shop owner is tricked into mounting it by a painting of his Uncle Albert, with terrible consequences. Despite a clunky script, the idea of Mel is a lot of fun, as Joan Collins competes with a dead tree for her husband's (Michael Jayston) attentions.

The final story feels the most like a *Night Gallery* episode, as Kim Novak's literary agent tries to win over a new client, not suspecting that he plans on using her upcoming luau for an altogether more sinister ritual.



Hammer and Amicus veteran Freddie Francis finds room for a few flourishes amidst the obvious cost-effectiveness. If you're unfamiliar with the sub-genre, there is some silly fun to be had here.
Jonathan Hatfull



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



From Beyond The Grave
Peter Cushing's shop owner delivers cruel punishment on his customers.



A FRANKENSTEIN STORY

The modern Prometheus

Details 15 // 77 mins // 2014 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Director** Billy Senese
Cast Jeremy Childs, Shelean Newman, Shannon Hope **Distributor** High Fliers Films



Originally titled Closer

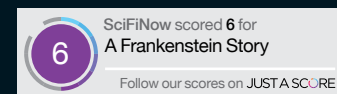
To God, this low-budget chiller is much more restrained than its rebranding and cover art would suggest – at least for the first hour. Writer-director Billy Senese's feature debut takes the themes of Mary Shelley's novel and brings them right down to earth. Victor (Jeremy Childs) has successfully created life with a baby made of cloned DNA and immediately faces ferocious public judgement. As he retreats to his country estate, he

struggles to protect his creation, but what's he hiding?

Senese does a tremendous job of building tension, helped by a very strong central performance by Childs. Are Victor's mounting stress levels due to abuse from Christian groups and threats of legal action, or is there something more?

Teasing flashbacks and cuts to secondary characters hint at the card the film has up its sleeve, leading to a gory and slightly underwhelming final act that rushes towards the finale and shifts a little too eagerly from chilly morality play to Cronenbergian horror, but this is a clever and restrained cerebral skin-crawler, and a very promising debut.

Jonathan Hatfull



FRANKENSTEIN

It's alive (and that's a good thing)

Details 18 // 86 mins // 2015 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Director** Bernard Rose
Cast Xavier Samuel, Danny Huston, Carrie-Ann Moss, Tony Todd
Distributor Signature Entertainment



Candyman director Bernard Rose

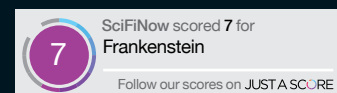
rediscovers his form with this smart and sensitive update of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It's a common complaint among fans of the book that it's never been adapted properly, and although Rose brings the story to present-day LA, it feels like the most faithful adaptation in years.

It starts with Danny Huston and Carrie-Ann Moss' husband-and-wife

scientists 3D printing the perfect human (Xavier Samuel), only to try to dispose of him when he falls ill. Adam escapes and wanders LA, learning and witnessing how cruel humanity can be.

Rose hits all the important notes and big scenes of the novel, delivering a sensitive creature whose journey is heartbreaking, violent and affecting. Samuel (*The Loved Ones*) is absolutely superb in the title role, and there's a great supporting turn from Tony Todd as the blind beggar. The finale can't match the stunning opening, but this is an excellent adaptation that treats Shelley better than any film has for years.

Jonathan Hatfull



400 DAYS

Bunker down

Details 15 TBC // 91 mins // 2015 // Digital download // **Released** 16 May
Director Matt Osterman **Cast** Brandon Routh, Caity Lotz, Ben Feldman, Dane Cook
Distributor Koch Media



When four astronauts

are locked into an underground bunker simulation for 400 days to test the psychological effects of deep space travel, they end up getting a lot more than they bargained for when they first signed up for the programme. After they lose contact with the outside world and are forced to leave the bunker, the planet they find is a lot different to the one they left all those months ago.

For a Syfy Films original, *400 Days* is surprising. If you're looking for something to fill the void while you wait for *Sharknado 3: Oh Hell No!* to air, this probably won't be for you. Instead, it's pretty reminiscent of Duncan Jones' acclaimed space drama *Moon*, but in a good way. It's stylish and atmospheric from start to end, and the concept and story behind it are actually really intriguing.

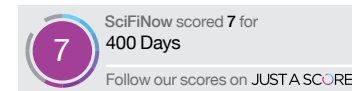
400 Days seems to know it's not groundbreaking and relies on its audience coming along for Brandon Routh, Caity Lotz (both currently starring in *DC's Legends Of Tomorrow*),

Tom Cavanagh (*The Flash*), Ben Feldman (*Cloverfield*), Grant Bowler (*Defiance*) and, um, Dane Cook (*Employee Of The Month*). But once you're there you end up staying for the story and to find out what the heck is going on.

It's also creepy as hell. The contrast between the sterile, pristine simulation bunker and the rocky wasteland of the Earth 398 days after the start of the mission both provide excellent environments for spooky sci-fi shenanigans to go down. A tense score, strong direction from Osterman and the frequent use of hallucinations and dream sequences make *400 Days* not only a surprising decent watch, but an exhilarating and psychologically thrilling one too.

Though a lot of questions are posed, not that many are answered and the clues that seem to be set down along the way don't really lead anywhere. What *400 Days* does do, though, is force you to think about how you would handle the situations the crew are faced with. The ending will definitely be unsatisfying to some, but those people should try to take it with a pinch of salt.

Poppy-Jay Palmer



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Moon

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Season One

YOU, ME AND THE APOCALYPSE

The final countdown

SciFiNow Must see now!

Details 15 // 300 mins // **DVD** // Out now **Creator** Iain Hollands **Cast** Mathew Baynton, Jenna Fischer, Rob Lowe, Gaia Scodellaro, Megan Mullally, Kyle Soller, Paterson Joseph, Pauline Quirke **Distributor** Universal Pictures UK



Promoted as a comedy and quite heavily sold on the idea of how weird it was to see Rob Lowe and Pauline Quirke in Slough together, Iain Hollands' apocalyptic British-American co-production quickly reveals itself to be something really quite sharp and as capable of moving the viewer as it is making them giggle.

The series opens with depressed bank manager Jamie's (Mathew Baynton) narration as he watches the end of the world from a bunker under Slough with a bunch of strangers. Flashback 33 days, and he's just been arrested under suspicion of cyberterrorism when it's announced that a giant asteroid is coming and will kill us all. Discovering his whole life might have been a lie, Jamie sets out to find the truth, while in the US, recently jailed librarian Rhonda (Jenna Fischer) must escape to find her son, and Italian nun Sister Celine (Gaia Scodellaro) is sent to the Vatican to work with Devil's Advocate Father Jude (Lowe) in order to help him debunk potential messiahs and miracles. Can this group find answers and their loved ones before the end arrives?

While the show has a global scope that's both convincing and impressive,

it's the intimate character moments that impress. The relationship between Rhonda and Megan Mullally's white supremacist, Leanne, is well played, and it's indicative of the writing's complexity from start to finish. Jamie's buffoonish best mate, Dave (Joel Fry), is often the voice of humanity, Jude's brash exterior conceals genuine faith, and Rhonda's scientist brother, Scotty (Kyle Soller), and his army general boyfriend, Gaines (Paterson Joseph), are tortured by the horrible decisions they have to make on behalf of our race. It's as much about the need for connection as it is about end-of-the-world madness.

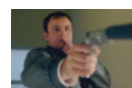
It's not perfect; the conspiracy and hacking business never quite convinces, and Jamie's evil twin brother, Ariel (also Baynton), often feels like an easy way to move the plot forward. Minor quibbles, though. This is a smart, sensitive and very funny, and the performances are excellent. More, please.

Jonathan Hatfull

SciFiNow scored 8 for You, Me & The Apocalypse

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Utopia
A group of strangers stumble upon an elaborate government conspiracy in Dennis Kelly's superb drama.



Season One

THE LIBRARIANS

Worse than the movies

Details 12 // 420 mins // **DVD** // Out now **Creator** John Rogers **Cast** Rebecca Romijn, Noah Wyle, John Larroquette, Christian Kane, Lindy Booth, John Harlan Kim **Distributor** 4Front Films



The fact that *The Librarians* uses Papyrus as one of its go-to series typefaces is a perfect metaphor for the state of the show: it's trying to be fun and exotic, but really it's just lame and irritating.

As a direct spin-off of the not-very-good *Librarian* TV movie series that nobody saw, the pilot opens with the Librarian himself, Flynn Carson (Noah Wyle), bumping into an anti-terror agent, Eve Baird (Rebecca Romijn), while out on a library mission to Berlin. The pair clash, but are inevitably forced together when it turns out that Eve is destined to become his next Guardian. Together, they put aside their differences in order to train a new generation of Librarians; including a labourer with an IQ of 190, a genius mathematician with a brain tumour and a man of mystery with sticky fingers.

The Librarians' main failing is that it's just so shit. The stories are shit, the soundtrack is shit, the special

effects look fake and unnatural – like the scenes in *Friends* when they go outside – and the levels of quirkiness injected into the show could induce vomiting. Even Noah Wyle is absent for six out of ten episodes, which doesn't exactly help when he's the show's biggest name.

As well as a fantasy adventure, *The Librarians* is also a comedy, but it's hard to differentiate between laughing with it and laughing at it. Occasionally, there will be a genuinely good joke that will make you genuinely laugh, but the dialogue is mostly rushed and a bit rubbish.

It's also quite a confusing show. The storylines are simple, but there are many moments that make you question the creative decisions. In the episode 'And The Fables Of Doom', a naked man's butt crack is blurred out. But why? Why feature a butt crack in the first place if you're just going to blur it out? You're a Rubik's Cube, *Librarians*, but one we don't care to solve.

Poppy-Jay Palmer



SciFiNow scored 4 for The Librarians Season One

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



The Librarian: Quest for the Spear
Find out where it all started with the first *Librarian* TV movie adventure.



Season Ten

SUPERNATURAL

Lay your weary head to rest already

Details 15 // 966 mins //  // 21 March **Creator** Eric Kripke
Cast Jared Padalecki, Jensen Ackles, Misha Collins, Mark Sheppard, Ruth Connell
Distributor Warner Home Video



Things are quite trying for the Winchester brothers at the start of the Season Ten opener: Dean (Jensen Ackles) is still a demon after Crowley (Mark Sheppard) turned him into one at the end of the previous season, and Sam (Jared Padalecki) is still trying to find Dean after he died and vanished.

Supernatural's momentum has been decreasing for about six seasons now, and sadly Season Ten is no exception. The stakes continue to be high, but there's only so much you can put your audience through when your central characters have already been killed and resurrected about a million times each. There's no danger to get worked up over. All there is to worry about is the state of Sam and Dean's relationship.

Most of the show's signature brother-angst this season comes from Dean's Mark of Cain, and the fact that he and Sam have no idea how to remove it. It's interesting to see this new side of Dean, with the Mark causing him to become savage and volatile when he gets too hot under the collar, but again we've seen it before. This is just Sam drinking demon blood in Season Four all over again. At this point, there's very little *Supernatural* can

do in future seasons to create an entirely new storyline.

The fun subplots that are woven between the big, beefy episodes are splendid as always, though they are also fewer and farther between than they usually are. Dean gets turned into a Taylor Swift-loving teenager, Sheriff Jody Mills (Kim Rhodes) gets forced into attending an officers' retreat, and Castiel's (Collins) human vessel Jimmy Novak comes back into the picture (sort of) when his daughter Claire, played by the delightful Kathryn Newton (*Paranormal Activity 4*), decides Castiel should be a part of her life.

The highlight of the season, however, is the show's 200th episode, 'Fan Fiction'. It's just a big, goofy, stupid masterpiece featuring Winchester-obsessed theatre kids, the Greek goddess Calliope, a high-school musical and a surprisingly emotional acapella rendition of 'Carry On Wayward Son'.

Poppy-Jay Palmer



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Teen Wolf

A group of magical teenagers bump uglies and fight fantastical evil in this supernatural series.



DOOMWATCH

The end is here

Details 15 // 1,030 mins //  // 4 April **Year Made** 1970-72 **Creator** Terence Dudley
Cast Simon Oates, Robert Powell, John Paul, Joby Blanshard **Distributor** Simply Media



You don't get shows like *Doomwatch* anymore. Fuelled by Cold War-paranoia, it wears its contemporary influences proudly, although time hasn't served to make it any less profound.

It sees the 'Department for the Observation and Measurement of Scientific Work' (nicknamed 'Doomwatch') tackle various scientific mysteries and undergoing odd assignments from week to week. While the brilliant, haunted Dr Spencer Quist (John Paul), new addition Toby Wren (Robert Powell), debonair ladies man John Ridge (Simon Oates) and lab coat-clad boffin Colin Bradley (Joby Blanshard) find their niches immediately, others are less assured: secretary Pat (Wendy Hall) seemingly exists solely to be condescended to.

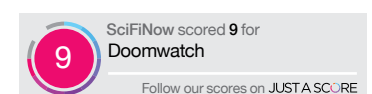
Indeed, by the second year, the more explicitly sci-fi antics of the first series have been toned down in favour of a more grounded approach, as indicated by the arrival of Barbara Mason (Vivien Sherrard), who has no trouble handling

herself. By far the most memorable episode, however, is 'You Killed Toby Wren', in which the team react to the death of the eponymous character. From there, things get even darker: 'Invasion' sees an entire village forcibly evacuated, and 'The Islanders' captures an isolated community struggling to get to grips with mainland life.

Thanks to the BBC's policy of wiping episodes, just 24 of the original 38 episodes exist. All of Series Two is present, but just two Series Three episodes are present, and the Series One finale depicting Wren's death is missing (although the climax is repeated in archive-footage form in the Series Two premiere). One nice surprise, however, is the presence of the previously unaired 'Sex And Violence', featuring *Doomwatch's* take on moral outrage and the Mary Whitehouse brigade – incidentally, one of the main antagonists is a very thinly veiled version of her.

Doomwatch remains an incredible viewing experience. It's just as relevant and likeable as it was back when it was brand new.

Steve Wright



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



The Last Train

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STAR WARS: RETURN TO HOTH

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games //
Players: 2-5 // RRP: £49.99

Battle Of Hoth is not a standalone game; it is actually an expansion, as you need *Imperial Assault* in order to play it. It's certainly worth buying though, as it's easily one of the best expansions we've played for some time, and is certainly the biggest addition to *Imperial Assault* since *Twin Shadows* was released in early 2015.

Return To Hoth is set on the icy planet shortly after the events of *The Empire Strikes Back*. While predominantly set on Hoth, there are also skirmishes on Bespin, with events in the game neatly mirroring elements from the sixth movie. Ultimately though, this is a chance for your own heroes to shine, and *Return To Hoth* introduces three exciting new characters.

The most unusual is MHD-19, a medical droid who is weak in combat, but able to make strong use of medical cards, effectively acting as the party's healer. Loku Kanoloo, on the other hand, is an incredibly accurate marksman who gains bonuses during combat, and is faster

1 BOARD

The game board is made up of numerous double-sided map tiles that can be slotted together to create a number of exciting maps.

4 HEROES

While there are only three new heroes, they are completely different to each other, and integrate well with earlier *Imperial Assault* sets.

2 HERO CLASS CARDS

Each hero has a deck that's filled with incredibly useful cards to be used during play.

3 MORE CARDS

Return To Hoth also uses Agenda, Command, Reward, Item, Supply and Condition cards that were last seen in *Imperial Assault*.

5 TOKENS

There are a number of different tokens representing damage, strain, conditions and unique allies and villains, including Princess Leia.

6 MODELS

The new figures look fantastic, and include snowtroopers, a pair of wampas and the assassin droid that was last seen in *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*.



TOP FIVE

than his companions, while Verena Talos is more of a rogue, gaining useful ability bonuses when defending or in direct combat. It's also possible to use characters from the previous games, thus adding to its longevity.

One character controls the Imperials and effectively runs the game like a Dungeon Master, reading out key bits of flavour text at the beginning of a scenario and whenever certain events are triggered. Players have a variety of actions available to them each turn, and also have distinctive Hero Decks that further define their characters. The aim is to complete each mission and follow the interesting story, which boasts plenty of slick twists and turns along the lengthy campaign.

It might not add lots of new rules, but it doesn't really need to, as the base game is already solid. The new campaign is huge in scope and will take months to complete, the included components are of a high standard, while the new models look absolutely fantastic and are just as detailed as earlier offerings. It's annoying that you're expected to fork out more cash for characters such as Princess Leia and Dengar, but these are minor niggles. All in all, *Return To Hoth* is an excellent game that greatly expands the *Imperial Assault* universe.

BEST FOR: ADVENTURE FANS

7
HERO SHEETS

These are double sided, with one side being use for missions and the other for the standalone skirmish mode.

8
DEPLOYMENT CARDS

There are used by the Imperial player, and have all the key stats for any enemies that will be encountered during play.

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3. DRANA, LIBERATOR OF MALAKIR
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4. OBLIVION SOWER
£7



5. OB NIXILIS REIGNITED
£6

The Big Book Of Madness

Publisher: iello // Players: 2-5 // RRP: £29.99

Iello's latest is a great effort that combines co-operative play with the popular deck-building genre. Players play a group of bumbling wizards who have opened the book of madness and summoned

forth a large array of dangerous monsters. The aim of the game is to learn new spells that you can use to defeat your enemies and eventually close the powerful book.

As the pages of the book of madness are turned, monsters pop up and trigger a set amount of curses. Players must work together to destroy the curses by playing cards from their hand that have the same matching symbols.

As with similar deck-building games, you can buy better cards that will slowly filter back into your deck to give you

a better chance of defeating whatever monster is currently in play. Each player starts off with different elemental-based cards, and you soon realise that certain spells are stronger against certain enemies, meaning you really need to work together to have any hope of completing the game.

As with many other co-operative games, the odds are heavily stacked against you, but the deck-building aspect does mean you always feel like you're in control of your actions. *The Big Book Of Madness* is a highly entertaining game, boosted by excellent artwork and a fun theme.

BEST FOR: FANTASY FANS

The Witcher Adventure Game

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games // Players: 2-4 // RRP: £44.99

Although *Witcher* fans will benefit more from Fantasy Flight's game, those that love the likes of *Talisman* will also find a lot to enjoy here.

The aim is to acquire the most victory points, with the game ending once three quests have been completed by a single character. Quests are based on Diplomacy, Combat and Magic, but are all largely completed in the same way, with the player travelling around the game world looking for specific leads that they can then turn into proof. Once they have received the required proof, they can

complete the quest. The four main heroes excel in different areas, so Geralt Of Rivia, who is skilled at combat, only needs three red leads for proof, while the magician Triss Merigold needs seven, although she excels in magic-based quests.

Players have two action tokens that they can use on a number of options each turn, from travelling and investigating new areas to resting or developing their skills and equipment. Each character has their own specific skill too, which ranges from singing to earn gold or brewing useful potions, while



they can also gain additional victory points by helping others complete quests.

It's not the most original of games, but is a challenging adventure all the same.

BEST FOR: TALISMAN FANS

Expansion Of The Month
SURVIVE – DOLPHINS & SQUIDS & 5-6 PLAYERS

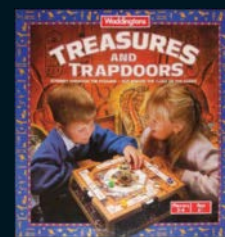
Publisher: Stronghold Games // Players: 2-6 // RRP: £15.99

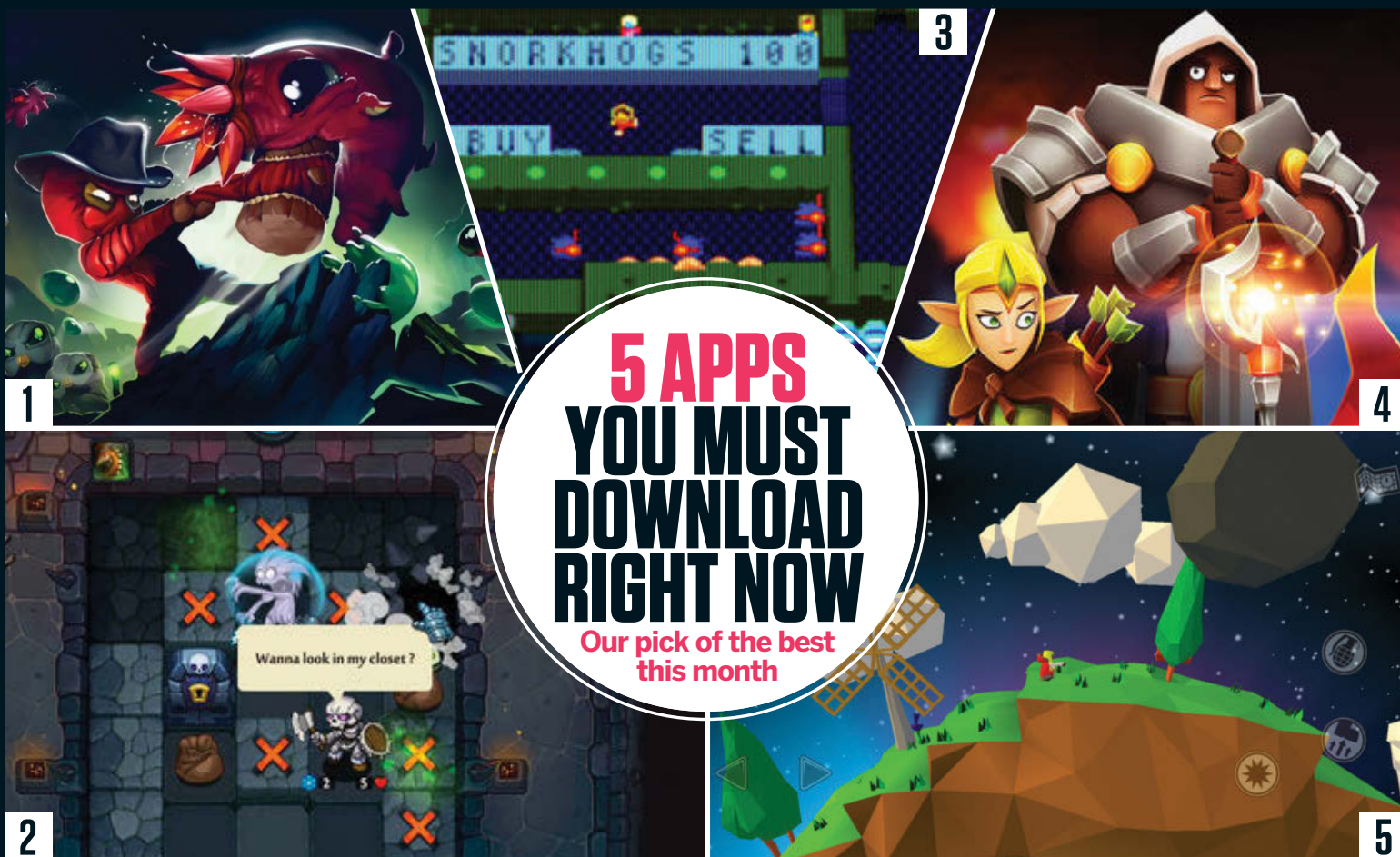
This recent expansion pack combines all the previous ones for the excellent *Survive*, a classic adventure where you must escape the sinking city of Atlantis with as many meeples as possible. In addition to now catering for 5-6 players, *Survive* also gets friendly dolphins and dangerous squids that greatly shake up the core gameplay. The giant squid is the most dangerous adversary, as it can attack meeples on both land and sea. Sea monsters are generally a lot more dangerous with the *Dolphin* expansion, but it's balanced out by the dolphins themselves, which are incredibly speedy and make it much easier for survivors to reach the shore.

Do You Remember?
TREASURES AND TRAPDOORS

Clash Of The Titans without the annoying owl

Treasures And Trapdoors was a fun game that saw you trying to negotiate a dangerous treasure-laden pyramid while avoiding its many traps and searching for a golden cobra statue. While the gameplay is relatively easy, it featured an innovative mechanic that featured a rotating turntable that would cause one of seven trapdoors to open, seemingly at random. Players could try to gain clues from the Pharaoh's eyes as play progressed. Once three jewels had been collected, the players had to exchange them for a key that would allow access to the coveted golden statue.





5 APPS YOU MUST DOWNLOAD RIGHT NOW

Our pick of the best
this month

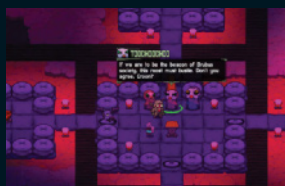
CRASHLANDS

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: £3.99/\$4.99



1 Playing as a galactic trucker, you're suddenly tasked with an impossible quest when the alien menace Hewgodooko derails your latest shipment, leaving you stranded on an unfamiliar planet. This story-driven RPG gets harder to put down as you work your way through the levels. It has bases to build, bosses to fight, over 500 craftable items to unlock and Cloud saving that lets you store data on the go and keep your place across your devices.

BEST FOR: GREAT ADVENTURERS



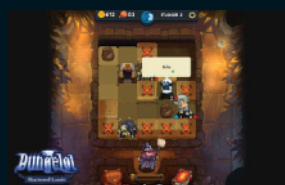
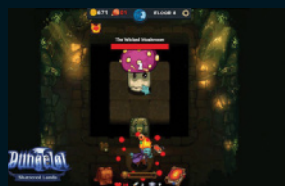
DUNGELOT: SHATTERED LANDS

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: £2.99/\$3.99



2 If you've ever wondered what a rogue-like dungeon-crawler app would be like if it was combined with classic Minesweeper and zombie cows then *DungeLOT: Shattered Lands* is for you. The result is as weird and wonderful as it sounds. It is as addictive as the last, and features four characters to upgrade, 18 dungeons to fight through, bosses to fight, a variety of mini games and side-quests to uncover.

BEST FOR: BOVINE ENTHUSIASTS



CAPTAIN COWBOY

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: £2.29/\$2.99



3 Get transported back to the days of 8-bit videochip and quirky CRT shaders with *Captain Cowboy*, this new puzzle-adventure game set in a giant asteroid space maze. With a gigantic, hand-crafted world to explore and unusual creatures around every corner, there's always something poised to get your heart racing. The best thing, however, is the gorgeous retro graphics. There's just so much to look at that it'll be hard to remember the mission at hand.

BEST FOR: RODEO ASTRONAUTS



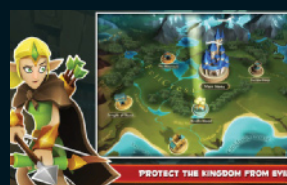
BATTLEHAND

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: FREE



4 Intense RP and old-fashioned card battling combine in *BattleHand*, the updated pocket adventure. Recruit teams of heroes and lead attacks across the usually peaceful land of FellCrest to fight against the evil minions of Queen Amethyst. With elves, mages and fighters ready to receive your commands, you'll be levelling up, unlocking moves and quests in no time. What sets it apart is its 3D animation that will make you feel like you're just a step away from FellCrest.

BEST FOR: MAGE HANDLERS



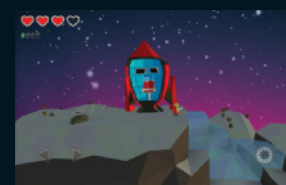
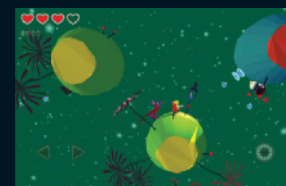
MOMOKA: AN INTERPLANETARY ADVENTURE

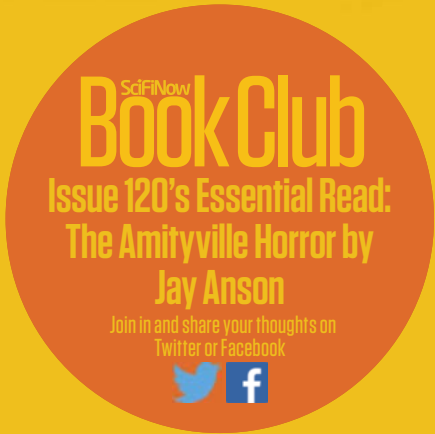
FOR: IOS
PRICE: £4.99/\$6.99



5 There's so much to explore and so much to shoot at in this adventure-platform-shooter hybrid. With a large planetary system at your fingertips and almost six hours of story, the universe is your oyster. The price tag is a bit off-putting, but it's worth every penny when you can't stop yourself from opening the app back up again every spare moment you get.

BEST FOR: PLANET PRANCERS





SciFiNow
Book Club

Issue 120's Essential Read:
**The Amityville Horror by
Jay Anson**

Join in and share your thoughts on
Twitter or Facebook



Fahrenheit 451

86 Essential Read

90 Beginner's Guide: Alternate History 92 Book Reviews 98 Adrian Barnes 100 Graphic Novel Reviews 102 Snowpiercer: Terminus



BOOK CLUB

Essential Read

**"I WENT TO FIND
ME IN THE LIBRARY.
BEFORE I FELL IN LOVE
WITH LIBRARIES, I
WAS JUST A SIX-
YEAR-OLD BOY"**
RAY BRADBURY



Essential read: Fahrenheit 451

Ray Bradbury's most famous work is one of the most misunderstood novels in science fiction. Far from an argument against state censorship, it was really a warning about humanity's dangerous love of new technology

WORDS MATTHEW HANDRAHAN

Few acts are so provocative, so barbaric and so loaded with the weight of historical events as book burning. The destruction of literature has been a favourite tool of maniacs, despots and armies for almost as long as humans have been keeping records.

Around 210 BCE, the emperor of the Qin dynasty in China buried hundreds of Confucian scholars alive, then made a bonfire of their philosophy and teachings. Around 150 years later, the great Library of Alexandria was destroyed by fire, the flames consuming a collection considered the most comprehensive in existence. At that point, the manufacture of books was a long, laborious and intricately detailed process. How many pages vanished in that fire, inscribed in volumes of which only a handful existed?

In the 13th century, the Mongol leader Hulagu Khan laid siege to Baghdad, a week in which the city was pillaged and plundered by his army. Every one of its libraries were destroyed, including the House of Wisdom, the most important centre of reading and learning in the world: mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, zoology, geography. Yet, by the time Hulagu's armies had finished, it is said that the river Tigris ran black with the ash and ink of destroyed books.

In 1497, there was the Bonfire of the Vanities, a fanatical burning of objects considered sinful by Florentine preacher Savonarola. Irreplaceable sculpture, art and books were torched as a baying crowd of religious zealots watched with pious fury. The Nazis also adopted a ceremonial approach, and the pictures of grinning German students posing by the smouldering ashes of destroyed books are now just a Google search away. The motives may vary, but the sad truth is that burning books has been as much a part of human culture as reading them.

This fact wasn't lost on Ray Bradbury, the seminal author whose most famous

story imagined a future where books are burned at the behest of the state – or so many people think. The culmination of ideas explored in a series of short stories written in the final years of the Forties, and published against a backdrop of anti-communist and anti-Soviet sentiment created and aggravated by Senator Joseph McCarthy, when *Fahrenheit 451* appeared in 1953 it was almost immediately interpreted as a warning against the possibility of totalitarian rule and the pervasive censorship that would ultimately follow. It was favourably compared to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which was published only four years before. Bradbury did little to dispel that reading of his text, and for the most part those embryonic impressions endured.

Considering that Bradbury was investigated by the FBI during the Sixties for perceived communist sympathies, the kind of suspicion that might well have started with some

shadowy, cigarette-huffing agent encountering *Fahrenheit 451*'s vision of a world, the brutalist tactics of the state playing out in an unnamed city at some unspecified point in America's future. The FBI's file – which was obtained and exposed by *The Huffington Post* in 2012 – noted that an informant had advised that "some of Bradbury's stories have been definitely slanted against the United States and its capitalistic form of government." The FBI feared that writers like Bradbury were using books like *Fahrenheit 451* to "frighten the people into a state of paralysis or psychological incompetence bordering on hysteria," leaving the way clear for a third World War.

More recently, the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) considered employing the number '451' as a HTTP status code. The governing body that ultimately decides on well-known online error codes like '404 Not Found', the IETF believed that there

Book burnings have been a recurring feature of oppressive regimes throughout history.



SYNOPSIS

Firemen have never had it easy, but there was a time when they could take comfort in the knowledge that they were helping

people, extinguishing flames that could scar, maim and destroy, and not torching piles of material considered 'illicit' by those in power: books. Not everyone saw it that way, though, and the more Guy Montag did his job, the clearer that truth became. Never more so than the moment that an old woman, facing the loss of her voluminous library, chose to burn alongside it rather than accept a future in which it didn't exist.

All firemen succumb to the temptation eventually, or so Montag's chief says, stealing a book before the flames begin to try and understand the danger they present. Did the chief know what Montag had done before that woman started to burn? Could he see the thoughts now playing out in his head? All he had to do was burn the book within 24 hours and it would all be forgotten. The question is: would Montag be able to do the same?



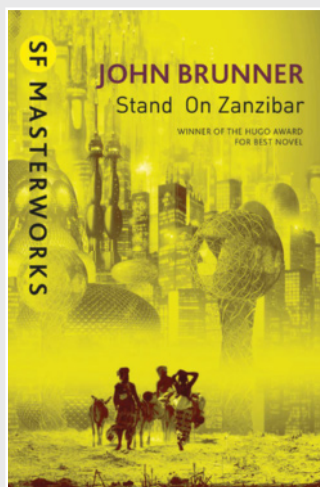
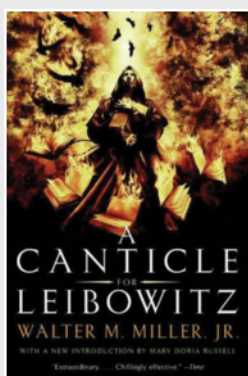
Bradbury was investigated by the FBI for perceived Communist sympathies.

Where Have I Seen This Before?

A QUESTIONABLE FUTURE

A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ ▶

Bradbury carried an unshakable belief that reading and writing was a pillar of society, regarding books as primary vessels for knowledge. Similar concerns are the very foundation of Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle For Leibowitz*, which depicts a religious order's attempts to preserve scientific knowledge in the aftermath of a nuclear war.

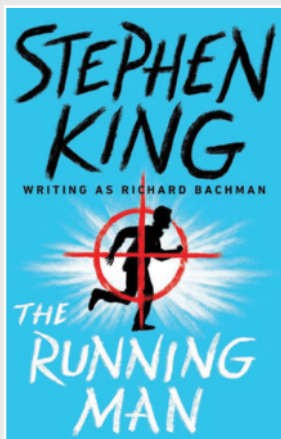


◀ THE 'CLUB OF ROME' QUARTET

Much like Bradbury in the early Fifties, John Brunner looked at the world a decade later and didn't like what he saw. Those concerns were the catalyst for a series of four novels, each exploring a contemporary issue: overpopulation, the environment, racial tension and relentless technological progress. Sadly, all four are just as relevant today.

THE RUNNING MAN ▶

One of Bradbury's most prescient observations was the commodification of news, with real violence and conflict packaged in the same manner as entertainment. A different take on that idea plays out in Stephen King's *The Running Man*, which was published under his pseudonym, Richard Bachman. Needless to say, the Schwarzenegger movie is a very different animal to the book, so we would suggest that you look at the source material instead.



A CLOCKWORK ORANGE ▲

Fahrenheit 451 has been lauded for its prescient ideas, but Bradbury was offering a warning about the path he believed humanity was taking. Anthony Burgess picked apart that kind of reactionary fear in this novel, which was elevated to a new level of infamy by Stanley Kubrick's adaptation.

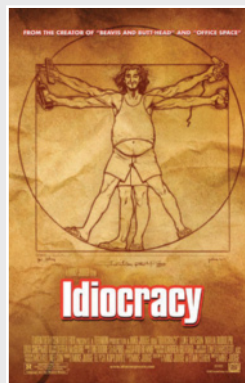


◀ THE MATRIX

Fahrenheit 451 is guided by fear of the dehumanising impact of technological progress, and far more so than the average science fiction dystopia. The Wachowskis' seminal film is anything but average, but it is a more typically conflicted treatment of the subject: technology leads to our undoing, then we use it to wreak spectacular revenge.

IDIOCRACY ▶

Bradbury closes *Fahrenheit 451* on the possibility of redemption, but as a whole it takes a dim view of where people might end up, given the ability to choose. The society depicted is passive, lazy and (very often) medicated, while younger generations are violent and disenfranchised. For a similarly jaundiced view of our hell-in-a-handcart future, see Mike Judge's *Idiocracy*.



could be no more suitable number for a situation where access to a website is blocked due to government pressure. It would be both thematically coherent and a fitting tribute to the man whose concern over censorship birthed one of the greatest science fiction novels.

Bradbury might have appreciated the sentiment, but the notion that he would have enjoyed his book being associated with the internet is unlikely. And the reason why goes to the very root of what Bradbury was thinking when he sat down to write *Fahrenheit 451*; not freedom of expression and freedom of choice in general, but very specifically the freedom of expression in literature, and the freedom to choose to read.

Fahrenheit 451 was a product of his suspicions about the rise of new media, his eternal, unquenchable love for the written word and the influential role libraries played in his development.

"I'm completely library educated. I've never been to college," he said in an interview with the *Paris Review*, first published in 2010. "I went down to the library when I was in grade school in Waukegan, and in high school in Los Angeles, and spent long days every summer in the library... And it's far more fun than going to school, simply because you make up your own list and you don't have to listen to anyone."

"I discovered me in the library. I went to find me in the library. Before I fell in love with libraries, I was just a six-year-old boy. The library fuelled all of my curiosities, from dinosaurs to ancient Egypt. When I graduated from high school in 1938, I began going to the library three nights a week for almost





ten years. Finally, in 1947, around the time I got married, I figured I was done. So I graduated from the library when I was 27. I discovered that the library is the real school."

Indeed, Bradbury's young life was so fundamentally entwined with libraries and literature that he married a book-store clerk. By the time the idea for *Fahrenheit 451* started to take shape in his head in the form of a short story called 'The Fireman', libraries had effectively become a low-cost stand-in for a real office. It was the UCLA library where he discovered that less than \$10 could buy enough time on a typewriter to get his vision down on paper.

"I created the 25,000-word version of 'The Fireman' in nine days," he wrote in a letter to the Fayetteville Public Library in 2006. "How could I have written so many words so quickly? It was because of the library. All my friends, all my loved ones, were on the shelves above and shouted, yelled and shrieked at me to be creative. So I ran up and down the stairs, finding books and quotes... You can imagine how exciting it was to do a book about book burning in the presence of the hundreds of my beloveds... It was the perfect way to be creative; that's what the library does."

McCarthyist paranoia certainly played a part in *Fahrenheit 451*, but the driving concern behind it wasn't the way governments abused power to control the citizenship. Rather, he saw the ubiquity of radio and he feared for the future of books, of literature, and even the basic ability to read and write.

In 1951, Bradbury bemoaned radio's contribution to a "growing lack of attention" among the American public. Television, which was just starting to appear in normal households, as a cause of even greater concern, and he didn't imagine that government influence would be necessary to get people to choose the passive experience of staring at a screen to the engaging experience that literature had afforded him. As great an author as Bradbury was, it's impossible to overlook the air of snobbery that informs this worldview.

There is a conversation between Guy Montag, the protagonist, and his captain at the fire station, in which he articulates the events that led to the banning of books. The government didn't ban reading, Beatty explains; people chose mindless entertainment instead. Minority groups agitating for the removal of offensive material dealt the killer blows. "Magazines became a nice blend of vanilla tapioca," Beatty says. "Books, so the damned snobbish critics said, were dishwater. No wonder books stopped selling."

If it doesn't seem clear that Bradbury is speaking through Beatty, consider the coda to the 1979 edition: "There is more than one way to burn a book, and the world is full of people running about with lit matches," Bradbury wrote. "Every minority, be it Baptist/Unitarian, Irish/Italian/Octogenarian/Zen Buddhist... feel it has the will, the right, the duty to douse the kerosene, light the fuse. Every dimwit editor who sees himself as the source of all dreary blanc-mange plain porridge unleavened literature, licks his guillotine and eyes

the neck of any author who dares to speak above a whisper or write above a nursery rhyme."

Fahrenheit 451 couldn't possibly have been a warning against censorship, because Bradbury was often censorious in his opinions when it came to anything that could interfere with or detract from an appreciation of books. There were "too many junky things around," he later told *Time Magazine*. "There are too many computers, too many emails, and too many devices. They get in our way, and prevent us from reading." When a publisher offered to turn *Fahrenheit 451* into an eBook, Bradbury replied, not too politely, "To hell with you. To hell with you and to hell with the internet."

Viewed in isolation, these comments could simply be a man ill at ease with the changing times, railing against that which he doesn't understand. Bradbury couldn't have argued against the internet and email in 1953, but he didn't have to. The principle that guided him then can be applied to any new technology, and his belief in that principle remained undimmed until the day he died, aged 91, in 2012.

"People ask me to predict the future when all I want to do is prevent it," he wrote in his essay, 'Beyond 1984: The People Machines'. "Predicting the future is much too easy, anyway. You look at the people around you, the street you stand on, the visible air you breathe, and predict more of the same. To hell with more. I want better."

Fahrenheit 451 is available to buy now, published by Flamingo.

"PEOPLE ASK ME TO
PREDICT THE FUTURE
WHEN ALL I WANT TO
DO IS PREVENT IT"
RAY BRADBURY



François Truffaut directed a film adaptation in 1966.



In *Fahrenheit 451*, the banning of books is met with apathy.



Your Take On The Classic

WHAT YOU THOUGHT
@SCIFINOW



relevant tool!" @lisahawson



"I enjoyed *Fahrenheit 451* but the underlying misogyny, and dismissal of 'minorities', is quite jarring 60 years later. #bookclub" @Brummie_Jen



"I 1st read *Fahrenheit 451* on Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach, on honeymoon. Read the 1st page to my wife. She didn't let me stop." @newjorg



"Hopefully your reading the @foliosociety edition. It's a beauty." @meowwy24



"A gripping classic, ripe with the dangers of cultural erasure, totalitarian control and the importance of the written word" @MalkyDel



"Fantastic, moving, thought-provoking; there aren't enough superlatives to sufficiently heap upon this masterpiece." @CultTVMike



"As with all his books, I find the idea for the narrative far outweighs his ability to tell it with decent prose." @m_leigh_g



"I remember it was a chilling cautionary tale." @Harlegat68



"It's a great, great book but harder to read. I liked it" @Corhonis



"One of the best books I've ever read. Scared me to death to see just how true it's already becoming." @AnnCarters



"Started reading it to calm my brain so I could sleep, ended up reading the whole thing in one sitting. Superb" @cyanideandjd



"Fantastic prediction of how our world of social media has destroyed the written text, ahead of it's time" @i_combat

What do you think? Let us
know on Twitter or Facebook



Which sub-genre
would you like to
see tackled next?

Let us know on Twitter
or Facebook



A Beginner's Guide To Alternate History

What is and what should never be WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

All alternate history novels have one thing in common: 'what ifs'. What if the Nazis had won the war? What if John F Kennedy hadn't been assassinated? What if Jesus had been a revolutionary agitator? As a sub-genre of science fiction, alternate history is set apart by the fact that the stories told within them could actually have happened.

More often than not, there are no lasers, no mutants and no spaceships. This branch of science fiction is frequently not too far removed from our own reality. It's more relatable than first-contact stories and space operas. Imagining that the events of, say, *The Man In The High Castle* could have occurred simply by the Nazis and the Imperial Japanese Army winning WW2 is more terrifying and mind-boggling than aliens could ever be.

Valencian knight-cum-author Joanot Martorell became a pioneer of alternate history literature way back in 1490 with his novel *Tirant Lo Blanch*. It explored what would have happened in a knight from Brittany had stopped the Turks from taking Constantinople. Almost five centuries passed before another popular author delved into the sub-genre again.

In 1845, American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a short

story titled *P's Correspondence*, which is considered to be the first example of alternate history in the English language. At the time of its publication, the concept was considered to be somewhat outlandish. The narrator, who is presumed to have been a real-life friend of Hawthorne, was treated as a madman both in the story and by readers because of his ability to

perceive realities in which long-dead famous people like Napoleon Bonaparte and Lord Byron were still alive.

Alternative history started to become more common in the 20th century with the rising popularity of the science fiction genre as a whole, and each decade brought a plethora of new works that explored more 'what ifs'.

Watchmen's alternate history sees the existence of superheroes changing the balance of the Cold War.



Alternate history tropes

Things to look out for...



Nazis

If you gather together every piece of alternate history literature in the world, you'll find a large portion of them feature the Nazis and Germany winning the war, and it's almost always in a hellish context. But it doesn't stop there: armies spread out, and before you know it, Hitler is God.



Bleakness

Alternate history stories are very rarely chipper. Whatever happened in the past to change the present is usually extreme bleak, the characters are often grumpy and a lot of people end up dead. Occasionally you'll find that everyone is fine and dandy, but 99.99 per cent of the time it's horrible.



Time travel

Sometimes past events do occur the way they occurred in real life, but then some numbskull decides to go back in time to change the events and thus alter the course of future history forever. This usually happens in the first chapter, and the rest of the book is spent trying to undo it.



Historical figures

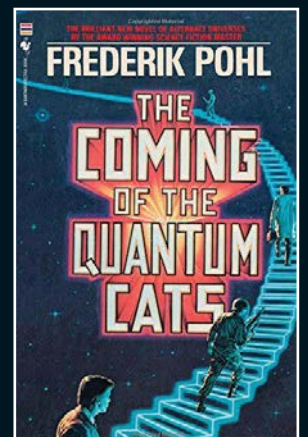
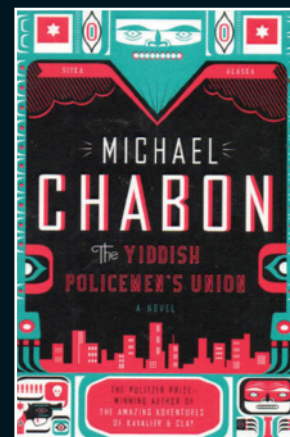
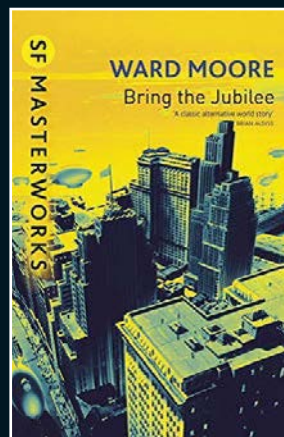
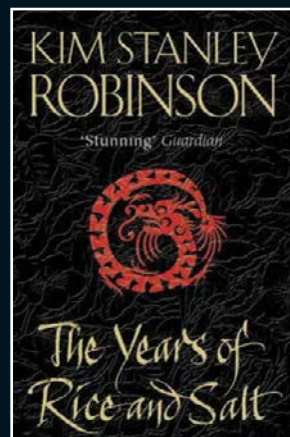
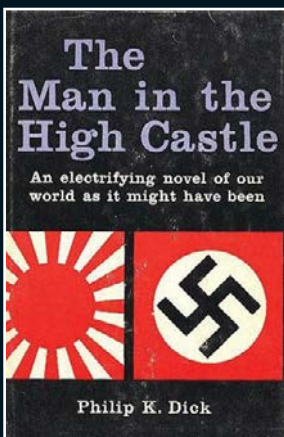
Many alternate histories get kick-started by dying too soon or not dying soon enough. It's strange to think how one person in time could have so much influence on the future simply by being alive/dead.



Philip K Dick's *The Man In The High Castle* inspired an Amazon Original Series last year.



The Comedian as played by Jeffrey Dean Morgan in *Watchmen*.



Axis victory

Lost in San Francisco

THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE
Author: Philip K Dick
Publisher: Putnam
Published: 1962
Price: £8.99

Things get terrifyingly real in Philip K Dick's acclaimed dystopian novel. 15 years after the 1947 surrender, the Nazis have occupied New York,

the Japanese have taken over California, and Africa has been almost completely wiped out. Following the lives of several characters living in a San Franciscan dictatorship, *The Man In The High Castle* offers a bleak look at what our world would be like if the Allies lost WW2. It's as relevant today as it was in 1962.

“Dick's a master storyteller; the way characters adapt to survive regime is brilliantly realised #bookclub” @Brummie_Jen

European union

The plague of mankind

THE YEARS OF RICE AND SALT
Author: Kim Stanley Robinson
Publisher: HarperCollins
Published: 2002
Price: £8.99

History is altered much earlier in *The Years Of Rice And Salt* when the 14th century Black Death plague kills 99 per cent of Europe. Separated into ten parts, it tells the story of how Muslim and Chinese pioneers repopulated the continent, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas formed a league to resist invaders. It has often been praised as being one of the most ambitious alternate-history stories ever.

“Fascinating alternate history. Fun idea to make use of reincarnation to follow the same characters through the ages.” @landettanien

Gettysburger king

Backmaker to the future

BRING THE JUBILEE
Author: Ward Moore
Publisher: Ballantine Books
Published: 1953
Price: £8.99

What if the Confederate States of America had won the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863? Sometime during the mid-20th century, a historian named Hodge Backmaker decides to travel back through time in order to witness the moment the South won the war and to change the outcome of the historic battle, but his plans quickly go awry. With one wrong move, his actions could well alter the entire world as he knew it.

“Interesting Alternate History. South is victorious in Civil War. Effective use of Irony/satire in presentation of post-war North.” @rmltpie

Lock in kop

Fercockt in Alaska

THE YIDDISH POLICEMEN'S UNION
Author: Michael Chabon
Publisher: HarperCollins
Published: 2007
Price: £9.99

Michael Chabon combines alternate history and crime in his acclaimed detective novel. The story takes place in Alaska, or 'Alyeska', which became the new homeland for Jewish refugees after WW2. Now, Orthodox Jewish gangs roam the streets of a 1940 film-noir version of the city of Sitka. Things get complicated when Detective Meyer Landsman comes across the corpse of a chess prodigy, and is determined to find out who killed him.

“What a novel! Complex alternate history classic and deserved winner of multiple awards.” @Sulphonix

A sci-fi tail

Across the universe

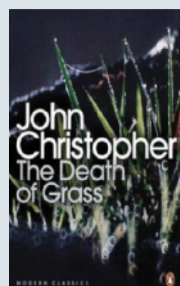
THE COMING OF THE QUANTUM CATS
Author: Frederik Pohl
Publisher: Random House
Published: 1986
Price: £13.42

Named in reference to Schrödinger's Cat, Pohl's novel explores scientific breakthroughs. Each advance in quantum physics shatters boundaries between universes, and as a result billions of possible futures collide, creating chaos. In one universe, young Joseph Dzhugashvili (ahem, Stalin) escapes from Russian to the US in the 1900s. It's a trippy and complex voyage across space and time.

“a good little sci-fi book, with some thought-provoking ideas #BookClub” @laura_fenner

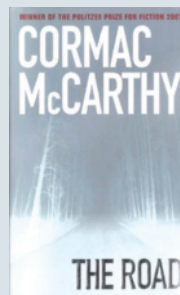
Your Five terrifying end-of-days scenarios

CHOOSE YOUR TOP FIVE
@SCIFINOW ON TWITTER



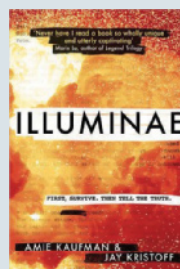
1. The Death Of Grass

"Plausible, heart-breaking and an ending so downbeat it makes Joy Division look cheery. #BookClub" @Zardo67



2. The Road

"Just grinding desolation and bleakness with no hope of a better future. Terrifying! #bookclub" @lisahawson



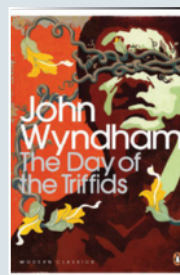
3. Illuminae

"It's not our world, but this book terrified me (in a good way) #BookClub" @Pasmine-Jalmer



4. The Stand

"Because I can see it happening. #BookClub" @2013 tweetybird



5. The Day Of The Triffids

"I wasn't keen on it, but that's because I'm scared of going blind. The big plants didn't help" @TheCrowAndGin

Details Author: Adrian Barnes Publisher: Titan Books Price: £7.99 Released: Out now

NOD

Up all night

End-of-the-world books are starting to look less and less like speculative fiction, and Adrian Barnes' debut novel has more than a little anger and resignation at the way we're treating our planet. It's more than a sermon, however, despite the mad prophets, crazed acolytes and sequences straight out of the 'Book Of Revelation'. *Nod* works brilliantly on several levels; as a nerve-shredding horror, a timely cautionary tale, and a study of a man's life being stripped away.

Our narrator is Paul, an etymologist working on a book about words that have been lost. He lives in a small

Vancouver apartment with his girlfriend Tanya, a successful PR who is as outgoing as Paul is reclusive. Paul's life seems cosy, if a little controlled, when the world-changing event takes place.

As most of the world tries to recover from a sleepless night, it becomes clear that this is a global event. Only one person in every thousand can sleep. Paul is one of the lucky ones. Tanya isn't. The sleepless go mad within a week, and die after a month. As the city goes insane, somebody confronts Paul with the similarities between this cataclysmic event and his work, and he finds himself at the centre of it.

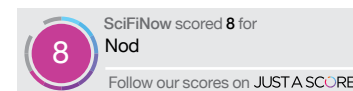
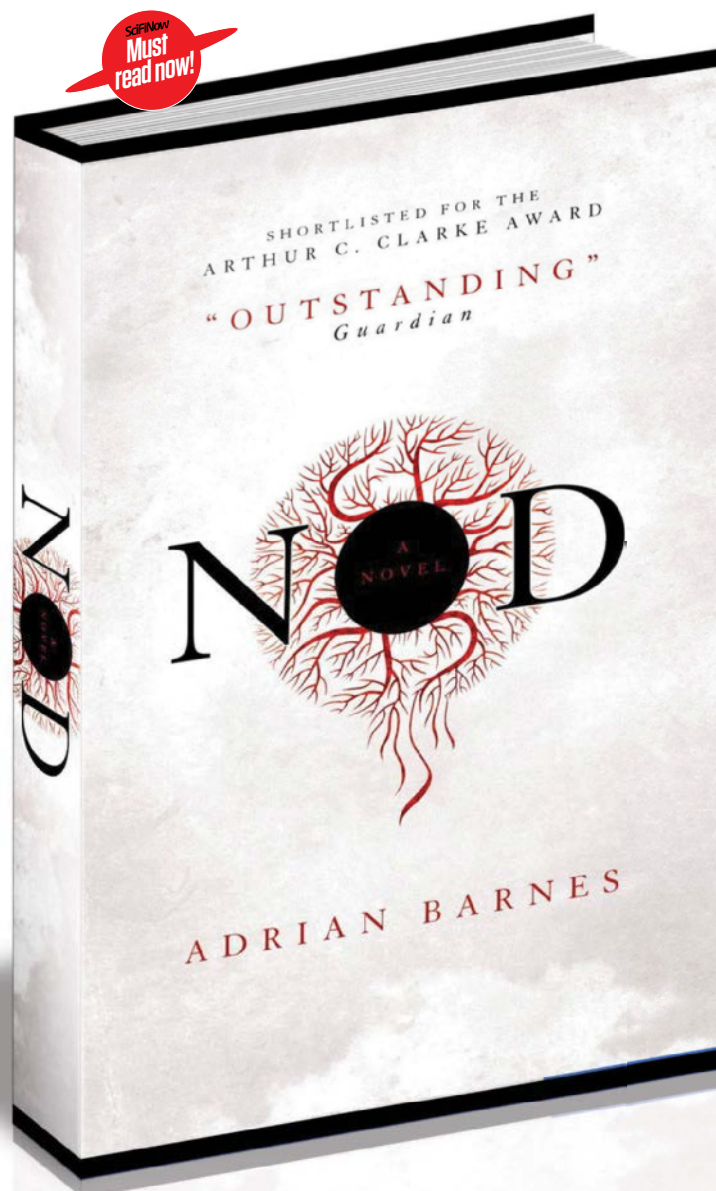
Starting at Day 18 before turning the clock back, *Nod* moves at a breakneck pace, one day at a time. You'll have a very difficult time putting it down. Paul is a very engaging narrator; someone who had a hard time liking people even before they went crazy, but who has a very clear need to do the right thing.

So while the brilliant and nasty mass-insomnia hook gets right under your skin (and Barnes' description of it is utterly convincing and relatable for those of us with sleepless nights), it's Paul's struggle to keep things on some kind of even keel that has us engaged. The sequences of Paul and Tanya trying to make their way through the nightmarish streets of ruined Vancouver are gripping, and there are sudden, shocking moments of violence, but we found the knife-edge conversations between the couple even more nail-biting. Paul's doubts about the length of their future together before the event make Tanya's disintegration all the more heartbreaking as she alternates between lashing out and struggling to hold onto who she is.

As the days pass and Paul is brought into an Awakened leader's Kurtz-like compound, it's clear that there's no turning back. The best-case scenario is that the crazies die before they can hurt the few remaining sleepers, including mute and eerily calm child Zoe who Paul feels compelled to protect. Barnes obviously has fun with the different factions of the Awakened, whose motives and methods operate with the unwavering commitment of the insane. They're ridiculous, which makes them all the more terrifying.

Again though, *Nod* connects because of its humanity. There are horrors, and there are shocks, but Barnes manages to give us a perspective on the end of the world that feels utterly relatable. The world is hard, and people can be cruel, but that's never the whole story.

Jonathan Hatfull





Details Author: Adrian Tchaikovsky Publisher: Macmillan Price: £16.99 Released: Out now

THE TIGER AND THE WOLF

Sober, expansive, grand ol' tale

Equally deft in the realms of science fiction and fantasy adventure, Adrian Tchaikovsky knows how to take you to a place, no matter the setting.

In a world where men can 'step' into their inner animal, *The Tiger And The Wolf* tells the story of Maniye, the lone daughter of her father, the chieftain



of a powerful wolf clan. With a torn soul, young Maniye never fits in with her tribe, ultimately going on the run instead of facing humiliation and very possibly death at the hands of her own people. Of course, a chase ensues.

Maniye's journey takes her across the 'Crown of the World', into the unknown and through harsh, unforgiving winters. Tchaikovsky weaves a grand old tale filled with archetypal characters, each befitting their animal form. There is a sense of the thirst for exploration, search for a sense of belonging and a Native American approach to character names and tribal conventions.

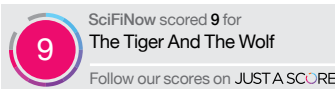
In terms of style, the infusion of the classical adventure and almost magical fantasy works to create a unique world that is simultaneously familiar and exotic, even to a seasoned genre reader.

In addition, Tchaikovsky is able to craft individual scenes with vivacity, making for visceral battle scenes and character confrontations littered throughout Maniye's journey. It makes the rather extensive length well worth the investment.

The real strength of *The Tiger And The Wolf*, though, lies in the main character herself. Accompanied by a serpent priest and chased by a relentless hunter, Maniye Many Tracks is a fascinating character; layered, strong, torn, constantly developing and hugely empathetic. While some secondary characters tend to steer toward the generic (the father, Akrit, the main culprit therein) or underused (the comical Asmender being one), Maniye and her tireless pursuer, Broken Axe, are inspired creations.

As such, the planned fantasy series building on *The Tiger And The Wolf* should have plenty more in store.

Erlingur Einarsson



SciFiNow scored 9 for
The Tiger And The Wolf

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

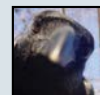
Prince Of Fools
Mark Lawrence
Game Of Thrones meets the Viking Sagas in a dark adventure, the first in the Red Queen's War series.

YOUR READS

What you lot have been reading this month



"Reading *The Secret History Of Wonder Woman* by Jill Lepore – about half way through. Extremely well researched book. #BookClub" @mockery66



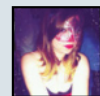
"I'm reading John le Carre's *The Night Manager*. it's the only one of his I haven't read, and it's great fun. #BookClub" @TheCrowAndGin



"I am reading *Leviathan Wakes* by James SA Corey. #BookClub" @GapStargate



"*The Art Of Star Wars The Force Awakens*. A fantastical journey that's enjoyable. #BookClub" @Jbarnes532



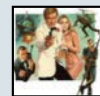
"*The Girl On The Liar's Throne* by @Den_Patrick the start was a bit jarring, but hoping for a good ending for the Erebus sequence. #BookClub" @Cascararogue



"*The Bazaar Of Bad Dreams* by Stephen King some very creepy tales. #BookClub" @philbooty



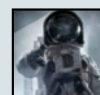
"*Edge Of Dark* by Brenda Cooper. VG! #BookClub" @ColanMitchell



"*Doctor Who And The Loch Ness Monster*. Can't beat a good Zygon story... #BookClub" @SharkOfLargo



"Haven't long started #BeneathTheDarkIce by @greigbeck, and really enjoying it so far! #BookClub" @CalebBeldom



"*The Fog* by James Herbert. A strange & gruesome story. I've read it loads but it still creeps me out! #BookClub" @paul_bowler



"*Daughter Of The Forest*, sucker for fairy tales so I'm hooked. #BookClub" @beckygracelea

Tell us what you're reading
on Twitter or Facebook

Author: Teri Terry Publisher: Orchard Books Price: £7.99 Released: 24 March

THE BOOK OF LIES

Teen tantrums with a twist

Two girls meet at a funeral and are soon found to be twins, albeit having lived entirely different lives. While there is intrigue aplenty in Teri Terry's new novel, it is the focus on the mundanity of teenage jealousy that makes its uneasy impact in *The Book Of Lies*.

The book is divided in order to tell its story from the perspectives of the twins. The reader will naturally begin to look for ways to distinguish between them, and the point is that this is deceptively difficult to do. That said, seasoned readers will guess key plot strands precisely because of the way the information is presented. The entire narrative turns what appears at first to be a simple tale of jealousy into a deconstruction of the way we all develop our identities.

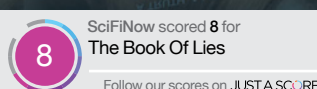
The cast is small but diverse, helping the reader to keep track of the story. Some of the characters

are archetypes (for plotting purposes), but others are so gloriously well-drawn and likeable that they anchor the tale to a sense of safety despite its more adult themes.

The make-or-break detail for many is likely to be the story's evolution, which moves from family drama to outright epic. The latter elements arguably overshadow some of the character study that takes place earlier in the book, but they are also effective. Terry proves herself adept at using different modes of language, and only occasionally overuses it. The additional plot strands intertwined with those segments are historical, and it gives the story a particularly romantic frisson.

The Book Of Lies combines a study of teenage uncertainty with universal themes of acceptance and betrayal. It leaves you with a satisfied and yet oddly realistic chill.

Charlie Oughton



SciFiNow scored 8 for
The Book Of Lies

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IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
Carrie
Stephen King
A girl tries to make friends, but murders people with her telekinetic power instead.



BOOK CLUB

The Girl On The Liar's Throne // Speak

60 SECONDS WITH

Simon Morden



How would you pitch *Down Station* to those who may be unfamiliar with your work?
'Chronicles Of Narnia meets

Solaris' is probably the best shorthand that I can come up with when describing the plot.

As with many of my stories, the fantasy and science fiction elements run side-by-side each other. I play with various Jungian archetypes and psychogeography, as well as riffing on the branes that separate different dimensions. But that's all happening under the bonnet: you can just enjoy the ride without having to worry about any of it.

Did you always conceive it as a London story, or was the location incidental to the plot?

Yes. I have a love-hate relationship with the place in that I find it both glorious and terrible simultaneously. The earliest settlement on the banks of the Thames was built some 10,000 years ago, and has been in almost continuous occupation ever since. London was probably the only place that could bear the weight of the mythology I impose without breaking it completely.

Have you always been drawn towards portal fantasy as a way of writing fiction?

I think the idea of a portal to escape through is incredibly beguiling, and a large part of it is the idea that we can cast off our mundane lives and become the heroes that we always believed ourselves to be. So I think we're all drawn to it, but when done badly, it can be shallow, self-serving, childish wish-fulfilment.

It needs the right story, and the right setting, to make it sing. Someone who knew what they were doing was Julian May when she wrote the Pliocene Exiles series, which are pretty close to being my *Desert Island Discs* books. I'm simply in awe of what she achieved in them, and if I come even a little close with the books of *Down*, I'll consider it job done.

Finally, are you able to ride the London Underground without thinking about

what's behind the tunnels?
No. And neither will you now. Sorry.

Down Station by Simon Morden is available to buy now, published by Gollancz.



Author: Den Patrick Publisher: Gollancz Price: £14.99 Released: Out now

THE GIRL ON THE LIAR'S THRONE

The Erebus Sequence ends

SciFiNow Must read now!

Finally, the Silent Queen speaks. In the last instalment of the *Erebus Sequence*, Den Patrick lifts the veil on one of his most intriguing characters. *The Girl On The Liar's Throne* focuses on Anea, who seemingly betrayed her ideals and her brothers at the end of the last book of this brooding fantasy.

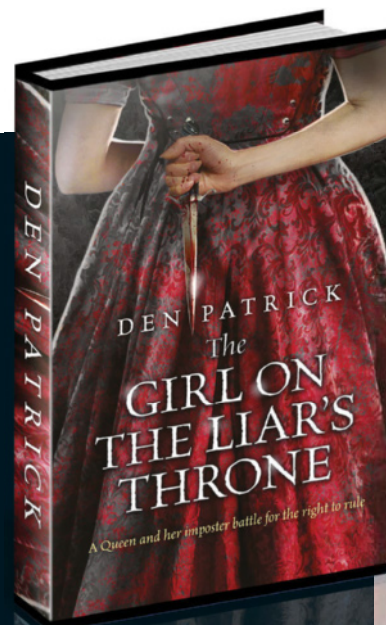
It's hard to say much about the plot, as Patrick opens his final episode with a game-changing twist. But we can say that all is not as it seems, and when Anea's brother Lucien declares war against her, the Erebus masterplan for the Italian Renaissance-like realm of Landfall is revealed.

Anea proves to also be worth the wait, having evolved from a relative innocent into a warrior over the course of the trilogy. Though she's not as deft with a sword as previous

series protagonists Lucien and Dino, her cool rationalism proves to be just as dangerous as their fiery tempers. Whereas they were fighting personal battles, Anea is waging a moral crusade, and will sacrifice anything to achieve it.

In a break from the other books in the series, Anea is not the only POV character. Rather stylistically, Patrick has set chapters up so plot threads parallel one another, with the novel's ending mirroring its beginning. But Patrick is an author that is chiefly concerned with character, and he does a surprisingly good job of rounding out every member of his enlarged cast.

As the final book, nit-picking fans might be disappointed that Patrick doesn't reveal all of Landfall's secrets. But while we may never know why the seemingly medieval castle's catacombs are full of futuristic



machines, *The Girl On The Liar's Throne* rounds off the series broad theme of flawed, outcast characters finding self-acceptance.
Jack Parsons

9

SciFiNow scored 9 for
The Girl On The Liar's Throne

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Boy With The Porcelain Blade
Den Patrick
Go back to the beginning of this richly gothic tale.

Details Author: Louisa Hall Publisher: Orbit Price: £8.99 Released: Out now

SPEAK Through the media of chat

Louisa Hall delivers a smart and affecting sci-fi novel designed to make you think about your surroundings.

Hall explores changes in technology and the origins of Artificial Intelligence and how they have altered the way we connect through the five distinct voices. These include Stephen R Chinn,

who is imprisoned in the year 2040 due to his development of lifelike dolls; Gaby White, a young girl who owned a doll and is struggling to come to terms with its loss by speaking to software programme MARY3; Alan Turing's correspondence from his youth to his conviction; Mary Bradford, a pilgrim making the long journey by ship to the new world; and the Dettmans, a couple who have grown apart and detached.

Hall plays with form, reminding the reader of the many different communication mediums. The poignant conversation with Gaby is a messenger chat, with the software programme often shouting at the void. Turing is writing personal letters to Christopher Morcom's mother, his first love from school who passed away at the age of 17. It makes for an incredibly moving insight into grief and the things we do to persevere.

The pages of Mary Bradford's diary from the 1600s raise relevant issues regarding the muting of women's

voices in history. Gaby's narrative intertwines with Chinn's in relations to his creation born out of love for his daughter, who he wanted to give the gift of "the pleasure of devoting one's life to another", but it also throws up questions about the way in which young girls' potentials are often stifled by society's constraints. The Dettman letters observe a man reaching out to his wife charting the often petty taunts and craving for attention.

The riches of the human experience and the faltering memory are navigated by Hall, making *Speak* an engaging, poignant and unputdownable read.

Katherine McLaughlin

8

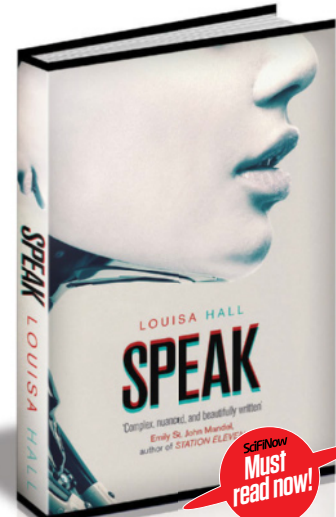
SciFiNow scored 8 for
Speak

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IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Lifecycle Of Software Objects
Ted Chiang
A slyly funny exploration of the impact of AI on humanity and their moral obligations towards a virtual pet product.



SciFiNow Must read now!

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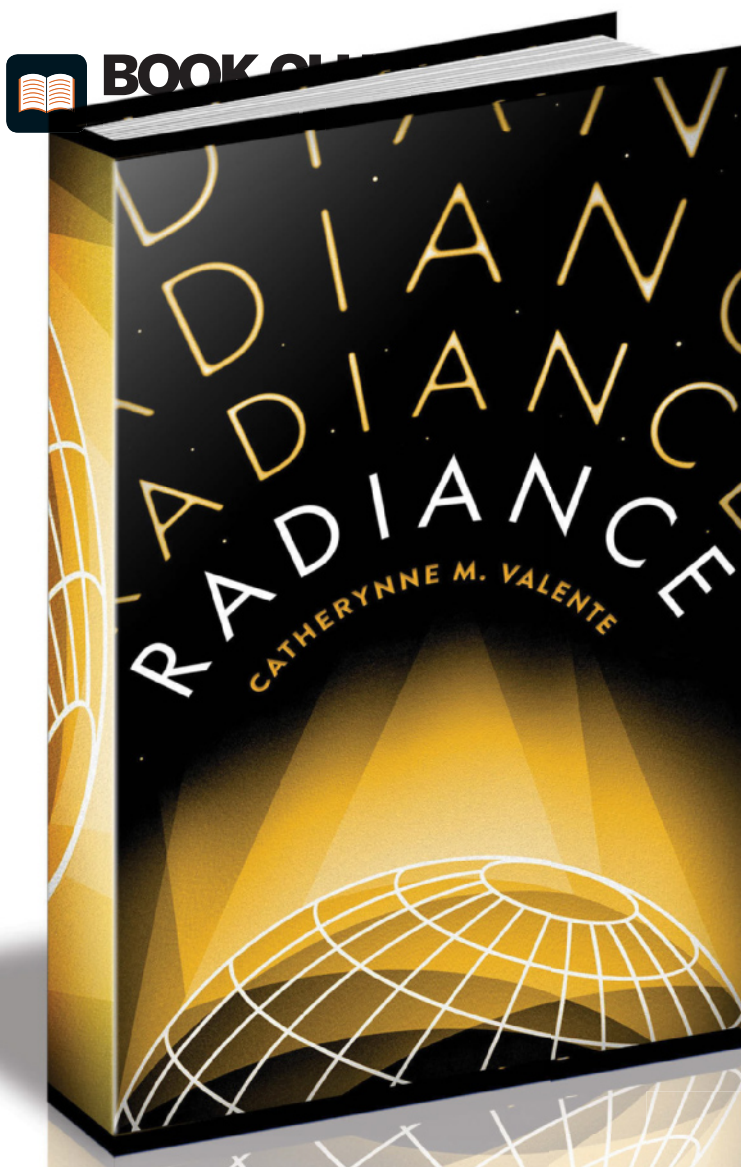


FEATURING

Eve Myles
Gareth David Lloyd
Kai Owen
Tom Price
Arlene Tur

MIRACLES 3 DAY

29 April - 1 May, 2016
Renaissance Hotel, Heathrow



Author: Catherynne M Valente Publisher: Corsair Price: £8.99 Released: Out now

RADIANCE Dying to make art

How many sub-genres can you divide science fiction into? *Radiance* is an insane mix. It's a space opera, an alternate history, a mystery, a decopunk literary endeavour... after all, author Valente herself has acknowledged that *Radiance* is pure "crazy pants".

Set in an alternate reality in which our Solar System is inhabitable, *Radiance* follows the disappearance of Severin Unck, a documentary director whose art leads her and her team to the ruins of a diving colony on Venus. It's this fateful journey sees her crew shattered, driven to madness, while Severin herself inexplicably disappears.

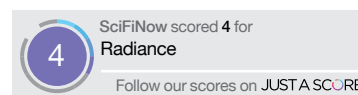
Like Marmite, *Radiance* is the kind of book that you'll either love or hate; there's no grey area between the two. The writing style is unique – almost Beckett-esque in its absurdity at times – and jumps constantly from one character's narrative to another. This post-modern approach is quite polarising, and comes across as overbearing and pretentious at times.

In fact, it's this writing style that really seems to make up the substance

of *Radiance*; it's like an exercise in writing techniques rather than a novel. If you're looking for a book to lose yourself in, this isn't for you. Each change of narrative is jarring, leaving you conscious of your own surroundings. There's no opportunity to become absorbed by the plot; it's constantly twisting back on itself, from planet to moon and planet again.

It's a shame, really. The idea in itself is fascinating and its execution is ambitious; from such an acclaimed author, it seems wrong to feel so disappointed with the final product. And yet, that's exactly what it is: unique and ambitious, but ultimately a disappointment.

Philippa Grafton



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Decopunk: The Spirit Of Age
Judith Dial, Thomas Easton
An anthology of short stories based around the decopunk alternate history sub-genre.

Author: Antonia Honeywell Publisher: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Price: £8.99 Released: Out now

THE SHIP Come sail away

A teenager's rebellion gets a claustrophobic jump-start in Antonia Honeywell's debut. The girl in question is Lalage 'Lalla' Paul, a 16-year old who was born "at the end of the world."

Famine, overpopulation and floods have pushed the human race to the brink of self-destruction, but Lalla's father Michael has always had a plan. He's hand-chosen a group of survivors to board a ship to escape London, but as they set sail, Lalla begins to question what her dad's end game is.

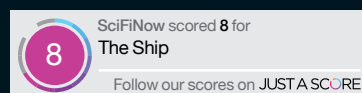
Everyone is grateful to have been given the chance to escape, and is overjoyed at the never-ending food, water and creature comforts Michael has provided, but no one apart from Lalla seems to be questioning where it is they're going. Is Lalla simply going through her rebellious phase at a delayed stage after years of being hidden from the horrors of the world? Or is Michael really hiding something?

It is convincingly written, and horribly realistic; fracking has poisoned the soil,

only registered citizens have rights, and a series of government acts have done nothing to help. While Michael revels in knowing best and having known best all along, Lalla's mother, Anna, resists the urge to flee, desperate to help and to provoke Lalla's independent thought.

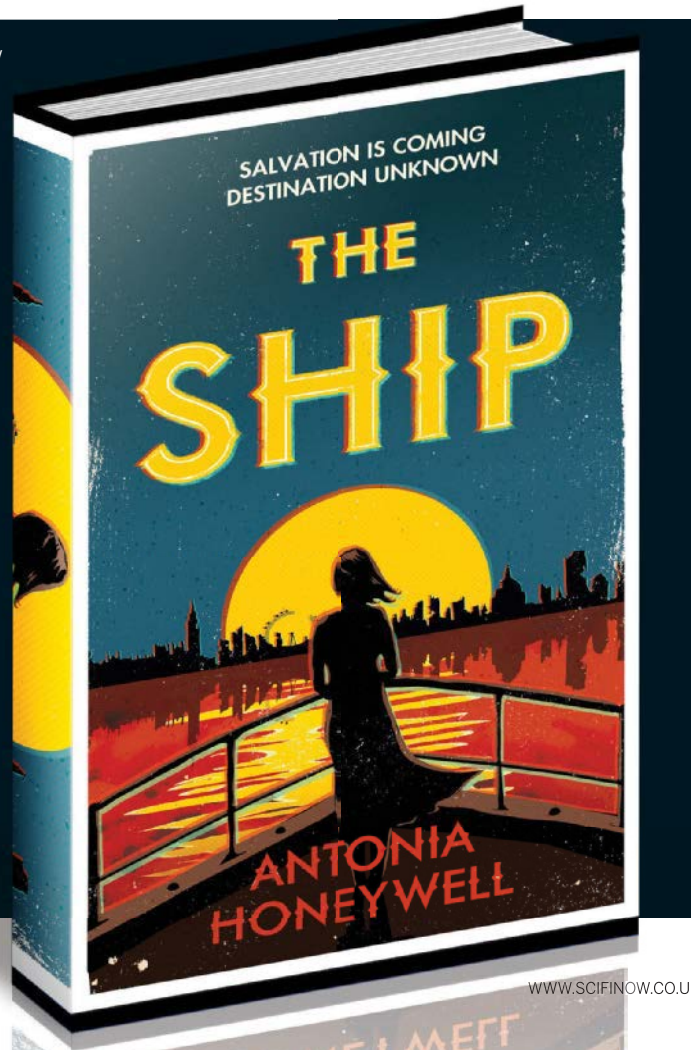
The author skilfully interweaves Lalla's jolt into adulthood with the unsettling ease of the rest of the passengers' slide into comfort and complacency. Honeywell makes no secret of her environmental concerns, but rather than coming across as preachy, it gives this coming-of-age tale a real punch.

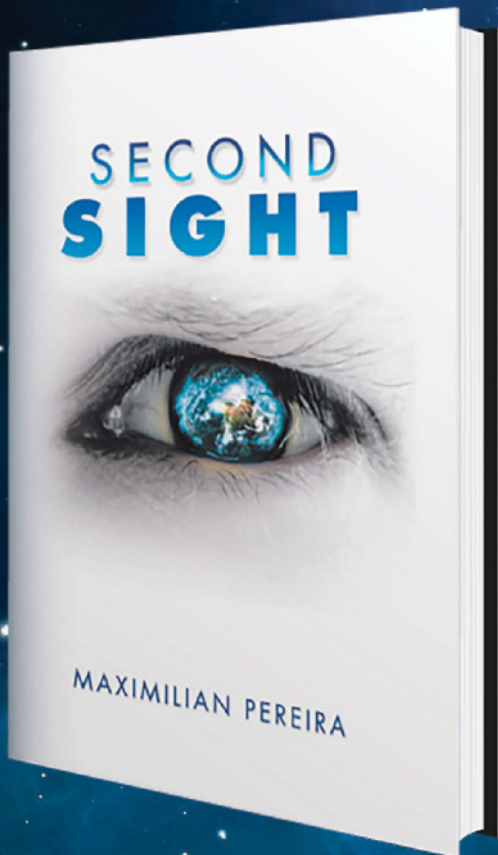
Jonathan Hatfull



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Death House
Sarah Pinborough
A teenage boy finds something to live for at a quarantined boarding school for terminally ill kids.





SECOND SIGHT

What happens when a superior technology is set to re-engineer the human eye? The visual function that lays the very foundation of human reality is threatened, with potential deadly consequences.

In "Second Sight" (published by AuthorHouse UK), author Maximilian Pereira explores this possibility and challenges readers to re-examine the thin line that divides perception and reality.

“It, therefore, challenges the preconceptions of our reality to which we cling and thus serves to spark our curiosity into the very nature of our existence.”
prweb.com

www.maximilianpereira.com



Chapters

Indigo

amazon.com

goodreads

RISE UP OR GET RETRO

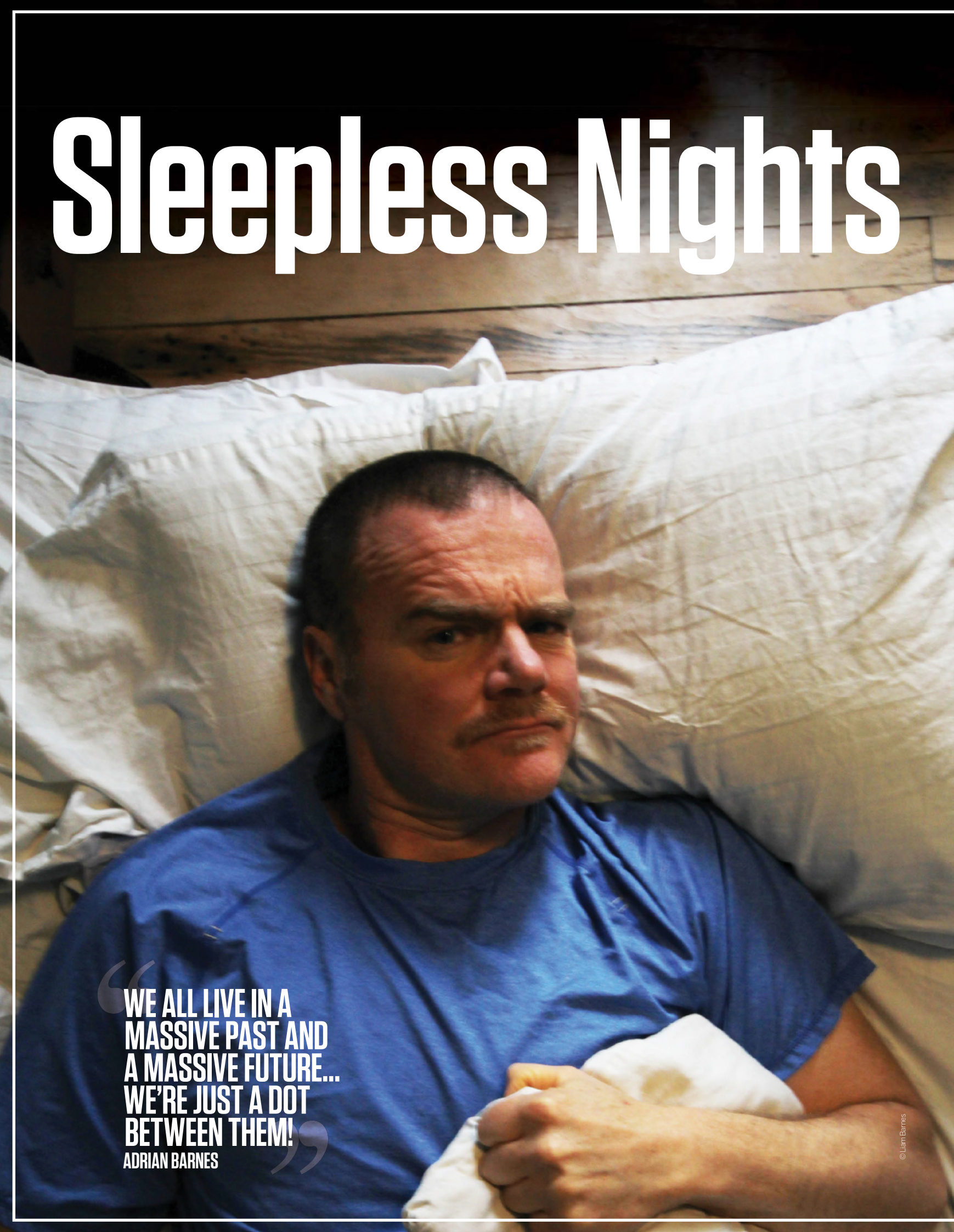


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Sleepless Nights

A man with a mustache, wearing a blue t-shirt, lies in bed with a distressed expression, clutching a white cloth. The background shows a wooden headboard and white pillows.

“WE ALL LIVE IN A
MASSIVE PAST AND
A MASSIVE FUTURE...
WE’RE JUST A DOT
BETWEEN THEM!”

ADRIAN BARNES



Adrian Barnes talks about his terrifying vision of the end of the world

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

We've all had a sleepless night. We wake up the next day grouchy, in need of caffeine, a little less likely to forgive minor irritations and a little more likely to snap at friends and loved ones. We spend our day cranky, but then we get an early night and service resumes as usual the next day. But what if the next night's sleep never comes?

Adrian Barnes' debut novel *Nod* finds the world suddenly afflicted by mass insomnia. Only one in 1,000 can still sleep, including our narrator Paul. The rest will go insane within a week and die within a month. Paul and his sleepless partner Tanya do their best to struggle on, as he struggles to reconcile his misanthropy and sense that we all had this coming with the need to push on and survive.

It's chilling, gripping and a powerfully moving piece of work about humanity at the end of the world, and a highly impressive slice of debut fiction. We were very excited to get the chance to talk the chance to talk to Barnes about his debut novel, the end of the world, and how his perspective on fiction has changed since the publication of his essay for *The Daily Beast* titled 'My Cancer Is As Strange As My Fiction'.

What was the first seed of the idea for *Nod*? There's the reaction of society to a terrible event, the language element is fascinating, and there's the idea of mass, permanent insomnia...

Well, for me at least, my ideas don't emerge one by one while writing. A bunch of stuff sort of bubbles away in my head. But in terms of a novel, I definitely saw 'no one can sleep' as a giant metaphor I would enjoy exploring. Beyond that, I've always loved old words and human insanity, as it reveals our 'normal' the deeper we go in it.

Is it helpful to think about the other end-of-the-world movies and novels, or do you have to put all of that out of your mind when you're trying to create the factions that would form at the end of the world?

I grew up reading science fiction that was full of 'big thoughts'. As a child and teenager, I loved them so much. Many of those novels pushed me into philosophy, science, religion, psychology and so on. These novels always inspired me to have a go at it some day! Science fiction is not only about the future; for me it's about today. It's about self-examination.

To what extent do Paul's worldview and opinions on the human race and what we're doing to the world reflect your own?

Er... all of it. No point in lying! I've always seen that what we call 'our civilisation' is sort of insane and requires a lot of analysis. And we need to go deeper and deeper. And that's Paul and Adrian.

Tanya, Paul's partner, is obviously a crucial character, and her descent into madness is heartbreaking to play witness to. How important was it that she not be

a simple victim or the stereotypical perfect girlfriend before the event?

I had such a hard time with Tanya. I loved her, but I also felt I had to torture and kill her. I've always admired and loved women so much in my life that there's no way I could write her to be weak. It was so hard to kill her in my book, and I wept when I hurt her and killed her. But it had to happen, I still feel. Because these things... well, they happen all the time in our world.

Did you find writing in the single perspective limiting at all?

No, I like the single perspective. Why not just wonder what's going on out there? And if nothing, I could write books about *Nod* in New York or *Nod* in London, I suppose! Though that said, I am beginning to write about the world after *Nod* at the moment.

It's a very scary novel, and there's some sudden shocking violence. Did you find it was difficult to have those elements without losing the emotional core of the novel?

No, not really. Fear and violence are a part of who we are as a species, as much as anything else. At the end of the day, the book is about humanity, and it was necessary to include the bad emotions with the good ones.

Did writing a novel that is concerned by the state of the world and what we're doing to it come fairly naturally? There's quite a lot of genre fiction at the moment that is obviously very worried about where we are, and a lot of it doesn't feel too speculative...

'Natural', yes. I have certain views of human beings, and used the metaphor of 'no one can sleep' to just... discuss them. Certainly this isn't a book that's based on science, except for the research about insomnia. I suppose I'm in a funny place, concerned with a future event that also raises up the past. We all live in a massive past and a massive future... we're just a dot between them! I think the future naturally attracts us most though, because of how infinite the possibilities are. It allows us the freedom of dreaming, even if those dreams are a little nightmarish.

In your wonderful *Daily Beast* essay about dealing with your illness, you wrote about how you've learned that love is the most important thing (I have paraphrased this horribly!). Do you think that your fiction writing will grow more optimistic?

I write in two genres: pain and joy, perhaps. *Nod* is pain, of course, and my latest book, *Satan À La Mode*, is full of joy. It's my own attempt at a modern *Alice In Wonderland*, filled with love and laughter. Why do I go to such extremes? No idea, honestly. Maybe I just find it so much fun to go here and there.... in a way, *Satan À La Mode* is a comic version of *Nod*.

Finally, do you have a favourite end-of-the-world story, or one that particularly influenced *Nod*?

Extinction by...

The many ways authors have brought about the end



Dementia

The End Of The Whole Mess

Stephen King's superb short story is told from the point of view of a journalist whose brother was hoping to cure aggression, but caused everyone's minds to decay instead. The ending is heartbreaking.



Global pandemic

Oryx And Crake

A supervirus takes out the world's population, and Snowman tells us just how the old race came to die out as he wanders the wilderness in the first book in Margaret Atwood's brilliant SF trilogy.



Blindness

Blindness

Not just a clever title. Jose Saramago's acclaimed bestseller sees the world suddenly lose its collective sight, with the exception of our heroine, who accompanies her husband to a facility where they must resist violence and cruelty.



All men die out

Y: The Last Man

Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra's amazing comic series sees amiable slacker, Yorick, and his capuchin monkey, Ampersand, the last males left on Earth. Can they find the answers, survive and rebuild?



The Earth stops spinning

The Age Of Miracles

11-year-old Julia finds her world turned upside down when the planet itself starts to slow and stop spinning on its axis. Karen Thompson Walker combines her doomsday scenario with a beautifully written coming-of-age tale.

To an extent, but it was more a combination of influences. Initially I didn't want to write about the end of the world, but more the mind of the individual instead. On the science fiction side of things though, my hero has always been Harlan Ellison. Books like *Deathbird Stories* or the story 'I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream'... either of which could have been a decent title for *Nod*, come to think of it!

One of the books that really influenced me was *Childhood's End* by Arthur C. Clarke. In that book, humanity as we know it ceases to exist, but the children of humanity become something different, like a sort of evolution.

I think both *Nod* and *Childhood's End* could be read as apocalyptic, to an extent. But perhaps it is simply the next step for our species and the world, a beginning instead of an end.



Nod by Adrian Barnes is available to buy now, published by Titan Books.

Details Writers: Saverio Tenuta, Bruno Letizia Artist: Carlita Lupatelli
Publisher: Humanoids Inc Price: £21.99 Released: Out now

IZUNA

Wow. So scare. Very myth

It's rare that a comic so beautiful on the outside continues to deliver once the cover is turned, but this fully painted fantasy of mythical ancient Japan is a genuine work of art.

Having worked in comics since 1992, Tenuta found critical acclaim ten years ago with the original French publication of *La Légende Des Nuées Écarlates*, *Legend Of The Scarlet Blades*, a story of an amnesiac Ronin adventuring through a land of folklore. It is in this same world that *Izuna* is set, but as a prologue of sorts requiring no prior knowledge of the world Tenuta has crafted.

Here, mankind and the spirits of nature, the Kami, exist in the same time and space, separated by an invisible veil, the Kamigakushi. Over time, the veil comes under attack from a plague of sentient demonic darkness, the Noggo, and the titular Izuna are created in defence. This race of enormous wolf-like beings with pointed and branched ears are birthed from their sacred tree, the Munemori.

While the Noggo grow ever more powerful in their efforts to break the veil, the Munemori conceives a new Izuna to replace a fallen comrade, followed by the first ever human to come forth from the great tree. Aki's arrival splits the Izuna into those who believe she is their salvation, and those who believe she is an agent of darkness.

On the other side of the veil, young Kenshin stands aghast in the bloody remains of a massacre, enslaved and moulded through dark magic into the perfect warrior by his renegade warlord father, a vicious daimyo who thirst for the Shogun's power. The fates of Kenshin, Aki and the Izuna are intertwined, but make no mistake – Aki is the hero of this tale.

Tenuta's storywork is bolstered by the addition of Letizia as co-writer, but truly it is Lupatelli's stunning paintwork that brings this magical realm to full and immersive life. Her depiction of darkness and light, hope and oppression, romantic heroism and samurai spiritualism urge the reader to step through the pages and into this captivating world of wolves and ninjas, pagodas and tanuki.

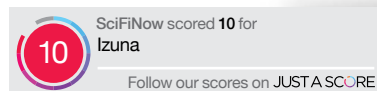
From the flashing blades of horrific battles to the swishing tails of the fox princess Kitsune Hime, Lupatelli showcases a mastery of fine details and sumptuous backgrounds even as she effortlessly

transitions through action scenes that could easily have been rendered chaotic.

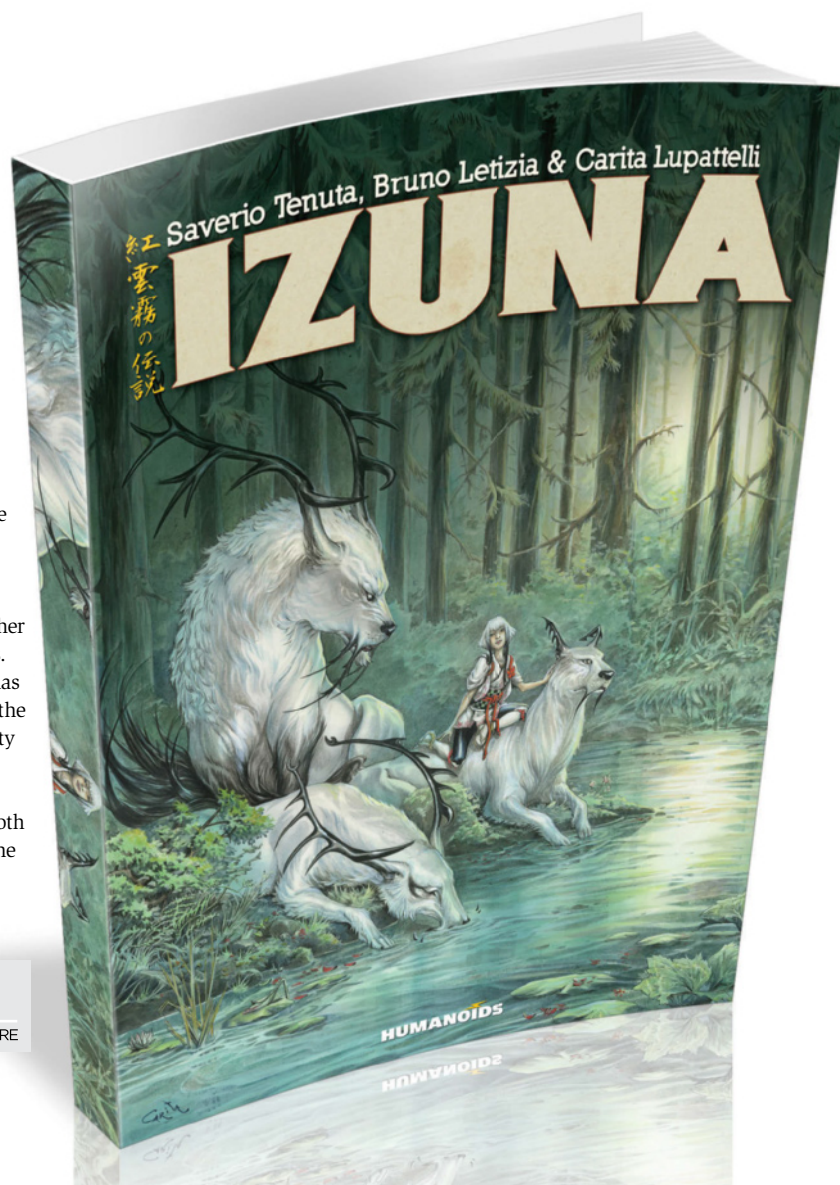
Comparisons with Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* are of course impossible to resist, with many surface similarities – the battle between forest gods and humans; the young female protagonist; and the giant wolves that are so iconic. *Izuna* though is perhaps least concerned with the humans, focusing more on the overall world and how the people and the Kami can benefit each other in the face of an all-consuming darkness.

In true Tolkien spirit, one individual has the power to shape the fate of the world, the first fruit of the sacred tree with the ability to bear her own fruit. The change she presents to an established culture brings both apprehension and acceptance, as both Aki and the Izuna come to understand the difference between living immortal and living with power.

Laura Sneddon



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
Legend Of The Scarlet Blades
Saverio Tenuta
Explore Tenuta's realm and the further adventures of the Izuna in the original comic series.





Details Writer: Zander Cannon Artist: Zander Cannon Publisher: Oni Press
Price: £7.50 Released: Out now

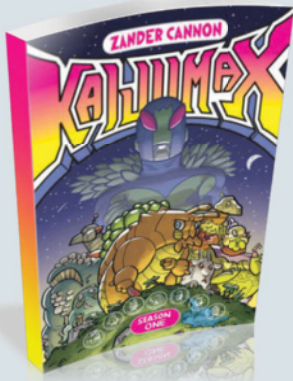
KAIJUMAX

Pokémon squee meets Oz brutality

Fans of *Godzilla* and *Pacific Rim* will already be familiar with the giant monster kaiju of Japanese origin, here placed in a maximum security prison island. Electrogor is the new detainee, flung into a world of conflicting social strata and dangerous power circles.

Cannon has great fun with the pop culture shout-outs and

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read now!



much is a tribute to the Toho films of the Seventies. Yet whether you spot the nods to *Destroy All Monsters* and *Godzilla's Revenge*, or you're just there for the wise-cracking monsters with their own lingo and a gym where they lift skyscrapers, *Kaijumax* is uniquely compelling.

A playful pop-art veneer gives way to dark and frightening prison drama in shocking contrast. Despite the humorous appearance and some genuine laughs, Cannon is telling a much more complex story about the destructive impact of the prison environment and oppressive hierarchies. Not for kids!

Laura Sneddon

SciFiNow scored 8 for
Kaijumax
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

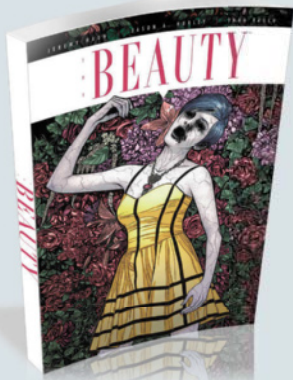
Details Writers: Jeremy Haun, Jason A Hurley Artists: Jeremy Haun, John Rauch Publisher: Image Comics Price: £7.50 Released: 31 March

THE BEAUTY

Drop dead gorgeous

In a society that goes to such extreme lengths to achieve physical perfection, what would happen if allure could spread like a disease? *The Beauty* is a new STD, and the symptoms happen to make you absolutely gorgeous with only the minor drawback of running a constant low fever. How do you cure a disease that everyone wants to catch?

SciFiNow
Must
read now!



Until the first Beauties start going up in spontaneous flames, quite literally burning up from the inside, the moral quandary is simply one of prevention versus desire – now it is one of literal life or death.

Two detectives attempt to unravel the riddles while in a move eerily prescient of real life news, a shadowy corporation seeks to maximise profit from Beauty 'treatment' rather than a cure.

It's a very strong and original hook wrapped around a great crime drama bolstered by brilliant characterisation. And fittingly, the comic is indeed drop-dead gorgeous.

Laura Sneddon

SciFiNow scored 9 for
The Beauty
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

Details Writer: Steve Orlando Artists: ACO, Stephen Mooney, et al Publisher: DC
Comics Price: £10.99 Released: Out now

MIDNIGHTER

**Violence + Fun x
Sex = This!**

Quite possibly the most universally loved comic that DC has published in recent years, the fan-favourite vigilante – the fun Batman, if you will – finally gets his own series.

Steve Orlando has managed a fine balancing act here, writing a fun and fresh take on Lucas Trent that satiates the demand of long-time fans while also giving new readers a very accessible intro to the character.

Midnighter is a man without a past, and this lack of baggage frees him from the brooding that plague many other comic vigilantes while also giving him a slightly tortured, but not melodramatic, soul. With his bioengineered enhancements, Midnighter possesses super speed, strength and resilience, and most importantly he has the ability to predict any possible outcome when fighting – making him a highly formidable and rather arrogant opponent to come by.

ACO handles art duties for half of the issues here, exploding the pages with his more experimental layouts and love of multiple tiny panels that emphasise action points and broken skulls, while Stephen Mooney takes over for the arrival of Dick Grayson.

Orlando slings readers in at the deep end, with a bunch of stolen powerful sci-fi weapons to track down and the many absurd villains that keep interrupting Midnighter's dating life. Newly separated from long-time boyfriend, Apollo, a glimpse of a dating profile



SciFiNow
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read now!

in the early pages gives new readers a quick rundown of who Midnighter is – and who he likes to bone.

Superhero comics are not exactly known for their acceptance of gay characters beyond an initial introduction and subsequent headline space, but Midnighter's sexuality is simply one of many facets to this complex character. That said, his portrayal as a non-stereotypical 'token' gay man has been welcomed by many, as has his sexy and fun dynamic with the straight-laced Grayson, who features in a third of this collection.

Laura Sneddon

SciFiNow scored 9 for
Midnighter
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
Grayson
Tim Seeley, Tom King, Mikel Janin
The man formerly known as Robin is now an Agent of Spyn in this super-spy espionage thriller.



SNOWPIERCER RETURNS

Jean-Marc Rochette and Olivier Bocquet shine a light on the newest adventures of the Snowpiercer

WORDS LAURA SNEDDON

BEFORE CHRIS EVANS SHED HIS CAPTAIN AMERICA SKIN FOR THE POST-APOCALYPTIC WORLD OF SNOWPIERCER, THERE WAS LE TRANSPERCENEIGE. THE FIRST COMIC

by Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette was published to great acclaim in 1982 – the height of the severe global economic recession and the dawn of Thatcherism and Reaganomics on the world stage.

Five years later, Rochette returned with writer Benjamin Legrand to expand upon the snow-blighted world, maintaining the core themes of transhumanism and class struggle, but with the aspects of a new generation. It's perhaps no accident then, that the latest volume arrives after a similar wait, once more hitting upon the themes that haunt our newest nightmares.

Rochette returns once more as the connecting artistic thread for *Terminus*, while Olivier Bocquet takes up writing duties for a unique and masterful collaboration that feels as politically relevant today as its esteemed predecessor.

The *Snowpiercer* volumes have been released over quite a long period of time. What was it that inspired you to create the final volume now?

Jean-Marc Rochette: At the end of the second book, in 2000, I already had the idea of abseiling in a frozen elevator shaft in search of a power source. I had the idea of an underground city, inhabited by clones... like post-apocalyptic infertile Barbies and Kens. There was a lack of cloning material, so they now could only create monsters. They were looking for a fresh source of DNA, like modern vampires.

In 2013, after the success of the *Snowpiercer* movie, my publisher Casterman asked me if I had any idea for a

sequel. So I started with that abseiling, but with the additional idea of going down to hell. Then several key ideas came to me: the train station, the dog, the city polluted by a leaking nuclear power plant, the deformed children, and the ending with the blind hero, the killer whale, and so on. But all these ideas weren't linked together, and that's when Olivier Bocquet came on board.

By moving beneath the surface of the ice, *Terminus* feels very Dantean. Was that a deliberate nod to the *Inferno*, and did that have any bearing on the decision for *Terminus* to be the first coloured volume?

JMR: My idea was to make *Terminus* in black and white, like the first two books, with colours only at the end of the story – the colours appearing with the blood of the killer whale to mark the reborn world, a new spring of nature. But during the making of the book, I felt that I needed the colours to appear gradually in the underground city, to show we were entering a new world, to emphasise the difference between the old world of the train and the new world of the city. The colours in the city can give hope to the reader, despite all the disturbing details and the mouse masks... If everything is coloured, what could possibly go wrong? Welcome...

Olivier Bocquet: Since the beginning, Jean-Marc was very clear about that idea of 'descent through hell'. The verticality was really meant that way. As you go deeper in the story, you go deeper underground, and when you finally reach the last circle of hell, in the nursery, the whole sequence is in red.

How did your *Terminus* collaboration come about?

Across the channel

Dip into some more classic French sci-fi

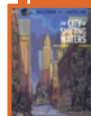


The Eyes Of The Cat (Humanoids, Inc.)

Alejandro

Jodorowsky, Moebius

Any work by the late great Moebius is an absolute must-read for any fan of science-fiction, and his collaborations with the famous Jodorowsky are no exception. This is their earliest gem set in a desolate dreamscape world.



Valérian And Laureline: The City Of Shifting Waters

(Cinebook)

Pierre Christin, Jean-Claude Mézières

Protecting the world from rogue time travellers is no easy job, and here the two spatio-temporal agents begin their adventures by attempting to intercept the worst megalomaniac that the capital of the Terran Empire has encountered.



The 6 Voyages Of Lone Sloane (Titan Comics)

Philippe Druillet

800 years after the 'Great Fear' our eponymous hero must battle his way through multiple dimensions, space pirates, gigantic robots and dark gods.



Aldebaran: The Catastrophe (Cinebook)

Léo

The first in an epic world-building series that spans three main cycles and a new spin-off adventure – all following the colonisation of beautiful and strange far planets in a post-global warming wrecked world.



JMR: I came up with the foundation of the story, the abseiling, the lynching of Brady, the nuclear threat, transhumanism, the mad scientists, the ending and lots of scenes. Olivier structured the story, made the dialogue, gave flesh to the characters, came with the detention centre in a cinema, the prison scene and lots of other scenes. And he also had a lot of visual ideas, including the most important one, that irrigates the whole story: the mouse masks.

So this book is really a combination of our visions, like a child is the combination of the DNA from both his parents. In the end, it's hard to tell who's responsible for what in the story. As for the film, it's really Olivier's part. He's the one who asked himself how to make the film and the comic book live together in *Terminus*.

OB: I saw the film before reading the books, and I really liked it. What the film gave me in the process of writing was two things. First, freedom: the film was as good as the first book, but in a totally different way. It proved that the story could be told without being slavish to the original material and still be great.

OH DAMN.
ONE MORE TRAIN.



SciFiNow | 103

From the makers of SciFiNow

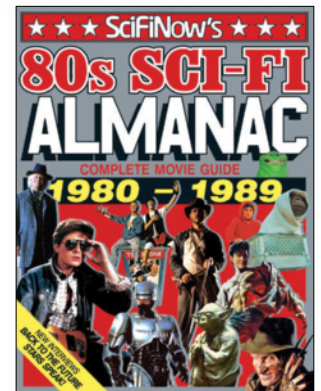


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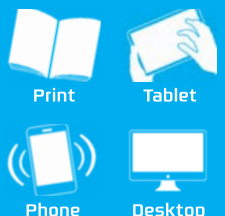
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Storyteller Toxic Avenger The Descent Star Wars

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REMAKES 106

INTERVIEW HENSON STORY TIME

KENWORTHY ON
HENSON'S PUPPET
CLASSIC 114



FLASHBACK
**THE
DESCENT**
INSIDE NEIL
MARSHALL'S
GAME-
CHANGING
HORROR 122

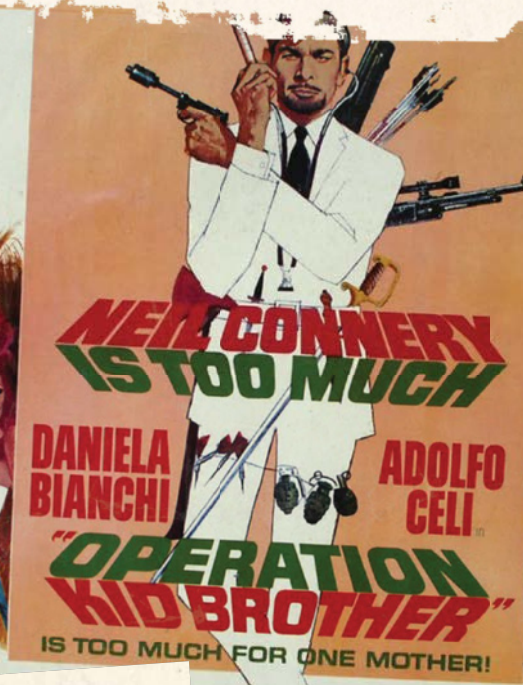
QUIZ
**ARE YOU
THE CHOSEN
ONE?**

REMINISCE ABOUT
THE STAR WARS
PREQUELS 126

THE TOXIC AVENGER

HOW TROMA'S TITULAR TITAN
BECAME A CULT HERO 118

AN IMAGINE
MONTHLY





THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO ITALIAN SCI-FI

ITALY HAS LONG BEEN CELEBRATED FOR ITS SPLATTER THEATRICALS, BUT FAR FEWER FANS KNOW ABOUT THE COUNTRY'S LONG-STANDING LEGACY IN B-MOVIE APOCALYPSE FLICKS AND SPACE-ADVENTURE MATINEES. SCIFINOW EXPLORES FURTHER...

WORDS CALUM WADDELL

To anyone with even a passing interest in the glory days of Rome-based genre flicks, names such as Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci and Mario Bava are as iconic as they come. Widely considered by critics and fans alike to be auteur filmmakers, this legendary trio of horror masters are usually the kicking-off point for fans who, even today, find themselves immersed in the colourful, non-linear cauldrons of classic Italian creepies.

Unfortunately, only the most dedicated of cineastes scratch beneath the surface of the stylish, black-gloved killers and technicolor terrors typical of the best-known titles. Indeed, the boom time of Italian horror – which encapsulates Bava in the Sixties through to Argento and Fulci in the Seventies and Eighties – also leads to a number of bizarre and badly looped sub-genres that barely anyone could have anticipated, from exotic cannibal and zombie pictures to sex comedies and even a brief fad in Nazi-torture flicks.

Far less recognised but equally as enticing is the Italian run in fantasy fare, usually encouraged by the success of a major Hollywood blockbuster, but frequently imaginative and interesting all the same.

The trend actually begins with Bava himself. For 1965's *Planet Of The Vampire*, which sees space explorers coming into contact with an extraterrestrial evil that they cannot fathom or even identify, the great man anticipated the set design of Ridley Scott's *Alien*. The next year, Bava took a further career U-turn when he was hired to turn out a James Bond-style spy-spoof entitled *Dr Goldfoot And The Girl Bombs*. Starring Vincent Price and released to general bafflement in 1966, and giving an obvious nod to *Goldfinger*, the story introduces a mad scientist (played with exaggerated aplomb by Price) who is working with the Chinese government to blow up a NATO meeting via some shapely, bikini-clad female robots. Featuring Bava's trademark use of eye-watering colour and delirious set decoration, this Cold War-era farce was a disastrous flop, and Price would later disown the movie.

Nevertheless, audiences were curious enough to ensure that the spy-fi era was not quite over and done with after just one effort. Fast-forward a year later, and ambitious Italian producers had hired Neil Connery, Sean's non-actor brother, to headline his own riff on MI5's finest. The result is the notoriously awful *OK Connery*, a muddled mess of espionage and 007 in-jokes. Also known as *Operation Kid Brother*, and directed by the late Alberto De Martino, the film roped in such *Bond* stalwarts as Daniela Bianchi (Tatiana in *From Russia With Love*), Adolfo Celi (Largo in *Thunderball*), Bernard Lee (the original 'M') and Lois Maxwell (Money Penny in *Dr No* all the way through to *A View To A Kill*). Featuring an inevitably wooden performance from the Scottish leading man, who plays an expert hypnotist enticed into gaining 'information' about a terrorist organisation by the British Secret Service, *OK Connery* is unutterably flat – a satire that barely raises a laugh. Reportedly, Sean was furious that one of his siblings had even been lowered to such trash – and so it was, little brother Neil's on-camera career ended just as soon as it had begun.

Possibly seeking to make amends for *Dr Goldfoot*, Bava would return to the genre with the superhero shenanigans of *Danger: Diabolik* (1968). Possibly also

influenced by the odd, but commercially successful, Italian comic-book caper *Superargo Versus Diabolikus* (1966), which would spawn a sequel two years later, *Danger Diabolik* had a bigger budget than usual thanks to the investment of ace producer Dino De Laurentis (who would later remake *King Kong*). In Bava's adaptation of one of Rome's most beloved comic-book antiheroes, the titular masked character (played by John Phillip Law) and his gorgeous girlfriend (Marisa Meli) basically take from the rich and give to themselves. Thieving from banks and multi-millionaires, the remarkably agile robber, who boasts a Batman-style secret lair, is both loathsome and likeable at the same time, and *Danger Diabolik* would go down as one of Bava's finest achievements. Today, it remains one of the greatest pieces of superhero cinema ever crafted.



"Dino De Laurentis was a huge fan of my father's pictures, and he always wanted to work with him," states Lamberto Bava. **"*Danger Diabolik* was a success in the United States, and Dino was very happy with the final film. Some critics did not seem to understand it, but then this was a character who was deeply rooted in Italian culture, and I think my father did well to translate it. Dino wanted my father to move to America after *Diabolik* and make more films with him, but he chose to stay in Italy to be close to his family and friends."**

With Bava returning to his nest-egg of full-blown fear-films, Italian fantasy took a rest period. Yet, it would be with the arrival of *Star Wars* in 1977 that the country really took up the mantle of intergalactic insanity. Given a then-massive budget of \$4 million to produce a Lucas sound-alike flick called *Starcraash* (1978), director Luigi Cozzi – a former assistant of Dario Argento's – crafted one of the craziest genre jaunts of all time. Interestingly, it was all a total accident.

"For years, I had been trying to get a sci-fi film off the ground in Italy," he recalls. "I had been doing some horror movies, but my true love were these old matinee ➤

Last Shark: guess its inspiration.





➤ pictures such as *This Island Earth*, *It Came From Outer Space* and *Godzilla*. I made a great little special-effects reel of stop-motion animation, just like Ray Harryhausen was doing, and I showed it to everyone I could think of, but nobody would invest in science fiction. They would tell me, 'No, no – Italian audiences do not want to see this sort of thing. It is horror which is popular just now'. I even went to [legendary western director] Sergio Leone to ask for his help, and though he sympathised, he could not find anyone to reconsider this attitude. The last person I went to was a French producer called Nat Wachsberger. He saw my reel and he said the same thing: 'Luigi, no one is making this sort of movie any more'. Then a few months later he called and said, 'Luigi, you were right – *Star Wars* has

just come out, and it is huge. So we should make your movie. But it all has to be changed. It has to be just like *Star Wars*.' And to be honest, I sighed a little."

As it happened, *Starcrash* would attract a cult all of its own, and it is easy to see why. Starring ex-Bond girl Caroline Munro in the most ill-fitting and slinky piece of lycra ever devised as Stella Star, a young smuggler locked in a battle against the authoritarian rule of the bearded Count Zarth Arn (Joe Spinell), Cozzi's film is a fast-paced, slapdash amalgamation of sci-fi greatest hits. Moreover, with a supporting cast that includes David Hasselhoff (as Munro's love interest) and Christopher Plummer – plus a sizzling score from John Barry – it at least looked, on paper, as if *Starcrash* would be a sizeable success. However, when it ended

up in the hands of Roger Corman and his New World B-distribution outfit, audiences became well aware that this was not the real deal. Not even a last-minute Anglocisation of Cozzi's name – to Lewis Coates – could hide the fact that this had 'cheap and cheerful' written all over it.

"It was released in late 1978 and treated as a *Star Wars* cash-in, which really saddened me," claims Cozzi. "My main problem was that I did not want to just imitate *Star Wars*, and that put me at loggerheads with the producers. To me, *Star Wars* was a serial – it was pulp. So I took *Starcrash* in a different direction. It is more like a Ray Harryhausen film, and it is also like *Barbarella* – the character played by Caroline Munro is really based around that. It was not huge like *Star Wars*, of course – how could it be? We could never duplicate these special effects. But Roger Corman told me it was his biggest hit of the year."

Not that this stopped Cozzi from flying the flag for Italian sci-fi and fantasy. His next project would be yet another attempt at following in the footsteps of a major American studio epic – this time Ridley Scott's *Alien*. Clearly aware of his work with *Starcrash*, it would be Cozzi who would receive the phone call to work on *Contamination* (1980), a cheaply lensed, chest-bursting cash-in that was mainly filmed in and around Bogota, Colombia. Oddly banned as a 'video nasty' when it made its British bow on VHS cassette, *Contamination* is a harmless but not charmless romp about extraterrestrial eggs that arrive in New York, and cause anyone within their vicinity to explode from the gut upwards as soon as they hatch. Leading a mission to find out what is going on is a rogue Scottish investigator played by Ian McCulloch (fresh from Fulci's *Zombie Flesh-Eaters*), who follows a trail to Latin America, only to discover an entire community beholden to a static foam-latex mannequin that is supposed to represent an all-powerful, galaxy-enslaving 'Cyclops'.



Sean Connery's brother Neil starred in shameless 007 ripoff *OK Connery*.

"MY MAIN PROBLEM WAS THAT I DID NOT WANT TO JUST IMITATE STAR WARS"

LUIGI COZZI

"Yes, the Cyclops was awful. I almost wept when I saw it," groans Cozzi. "I was told we were going to have the greatest alien ever seen, then I found out we had a ridiculous creature that could not even move and had a light-bulb eye. When I got hired to make that movie, all they wanted was something that would be like *Alien*. I said, 'We don't have the money to create a spaceship, so what if the alien is already on Earth?' They agreed, and then I got a lot of freedom. I just had to make sure people could burst open at the chest. That was what the backers liked most about *Alien*!"



At the very least, *Contamination* would lead to another enterprising attempt at ripping off Scott. Alas, when a dull little escapade entitled *Alien 2* slipped out into Italian theatres later in 1980, Fox went for the jugular and forced an immediate title change to *Alien Terror*. A similar fate faced journeyman director Enzo Castellari when he chanced *The Last Shark* in 1981. A shameless attempt to recreate *Jaws*, right down to similar characters and an almost identical plot, it was little wonder that it got into legal trouble and was ultimately pulled from cinemas worldwide. While *Jaws* is not really a 'fantasy' flick, *The Last Shark* veers into genre territory by having its great white purposely act with intelligence; from attempting to trap divers in a cave by pushing rocks into the exit to breaking through boats and stalking specific characters. Interestingly, this 'fish-intelligence' would later make it into the third *Jaws* third film, which was released in 1983.



Starcrash was Italy's answer to *Star Wars*.

"Yes, and this bothers me," affirms Castellari. "I went to see *Jaws 3D*, and they had their shark targeting people, breaking through glass, knocking rocks around and all sorts of things. It was all copied from *Last Shark* – but no one could see my movie at that point because they had succeeded in suing us!"

Strangely though, it wouldn't be *Alien*, *Jaws* or *Star Wars* that instigated a new era for Italian sci-fi. Rather, it would be John Carpenter's *Escape From New York* in 1981, which proved to be an enormous box-office attraction in Italy. Soon enough, Snake Plissken wannabes and tormented anti-government rebels were the name of the game. Assisted by the VHS-era success of *The Bronx Warriors* (1982), helmed by Castellari

IT IS NOT ALL ONE WAY...

How Mario Bava made Ridley Scott the man he is today...

Everyone from Quentin Tarantino to Martin Scorsese will speak enthusiastically about the legacy of Mario Bava – one of Italy's most underrated filmmakers, whose reputation for creating a heady slew of (predominantly) art-horror films went, sadly, unrecognised during his lifetime. Yet, it is with *Planet Of The Vampires* that most new fans discover Bava for the first time. Highlighting a desolate space station awash in mist and a genuine feeling of being 'picked off' by an unexplainable otherworldly threat, Bava's movie is viewed by almost everyone as an early template for *Alien*. Seen today, and the production, as with most of the director's work, still holds its own, with some gregarious use of technicolor and a classic sense of space trepidation. Check it out, and then watch *Prometheus* as well – Ridley Scott is not above a few 'winks' to one of his earliest cinematic influences.



It's safe to say you haven't seen David Hasselhoff like this before.





STARCRASH PT II?

How one of Italy's biggest sci-fi films never quite ended up with the sequel it deserved

When *Starcrash* arrived in cinemas in 1978, it not only turned a healthy profit; it ended on the sort of note that – just as with *Star Wars* the previous year – hinted that a sequel was sure to be on the way. This was indeed supposed to be the case, but as Luigi Cozzi explains, it never quite worked out that way. “When I wrote the script for *Starcrash*, I knew that sci-fi was taking off,” acknowledges Cozzi. “So I decided to do another screenplay, this one called *Star Riders*. I gave it to Nat Wachsberger, the producer of *Starcrash*, and said, “Maybe after this movie we can film another project – tell me if you like this, because I just wrote it.” Well, what happened is that after my *Starcrash* was a success, he went through *Star Riders* and changed all the characters, so now it could be a sequel. He took it to Cannon Films, and they said, “Okay, let’s do *Starcrash II*,” but he needed my permission for this script, and when I found out what he had done I said, “No, absolutely not. This is not even a *Starcrash* movie!” Thankfully, Cannon had another movie ready to go at that time – *Hercules* – and they said, “Well, we liked what you did with *Starcrash*, so come and make this instead.” I know Nat was not happy, and that is why you never got a *Starcrash II*.”



Ultimately, a *Starcrash* sequel never materialised.

➤ from a script by Fulci’s regular pen-man Dardano Sacchetti, the titles came thick and fast. *Escape From The Bronx*, *2020 Freedom Fighters*, *2072: The New Gladiators*, *Endgame*, *The Atlantis Interceptors*, *The New Barbarians*, *2019: After The Fall Of New York* – all of these were made within a two-year period, and each one offers a mix of sleaze, cheese and post-apocalyptic battlegrounds in which heroes and villains pit their wits against one another, *Mad Max*-style.

“I remember the period during the preparation and shooting of *The Bronx Warriors* with great pleasure,” reflects Castellari, who also called the shots on its loosely related sequels *The New Barbarians* (1982) and *Escape From The Bronx* (1983). “People thought I was mad to actually film in the Bronx – they told me it would be really dangerous out there. Well, dangerous locations had never influenced the making of one of my movies before [laughs]. I went out to New York, and I treated the people of the Bronx with respect. I always invited them to eat lunch with us, and I invited some of them to work as extras on the movie. They protected me for the whole period of the filming. I also had a great leading man in the wonderful Fred Williamson, a first-class collaborator who was doing many Italian movies at that time. Fred is an extraordinary person and a fantastic, underrated actor. He is also a very intelligent and well-prepared professional.”

At this point in time, one way for Italians to trigger action at the international box office was to introduce a somewhat recognisable (but not too expensive) American thespian. Former football player turned blaxploitation icon Williamson was one such man, collaborating with Castellari and also taking on the lead role for Fulci’s *2072: The New Gladiators*. The latter pre-dates the Schwarzenegger hit *The Running Man* with its plot, in which a futuristic TV network steals convicts from death row and forces them to fight to the death in the hope of increasing ratings.

The Atlantis Interceptors was one of many *Escape From NY* knock-offs.



“The blaxploitation films had dried up, but I could do my own stunts and I had a tough-guy image, so when the chance to work in Italy came up I was thrilled,” enthuses Williamson. “I was given the chance to come out on top in these movies, just like I had in my blaxploitation films, and I got to work with some interesting characters. Fulci stands out because he was so filthy: he was always coughing, smoking on a pipe – he looked as if he never went near a shower in the morning [laughs]. But those were great days, because these directors, who were true professionals, were making movies that they knew would play everywhere, and that meant I kept getting some very strong roles.”

Usually featuring motorcycle chases (in *2072: The New Gladiators*, Williamson gleefully decapitates his opponents while driving one at high speed) and dusty landscapes, the *Escape From New York* cash-ins remain first-class beer-and-pizza movies. Or put it this way, there is not one which is inferior to Carpenter’s own *Escape From LA*.

Furthermore, a few even add an unexpected twist or two. Take *Rats: Nights Of Terror* (1984), which sounds, from the title, as if it is a mere cheapo-creature ➤

You feel them in your blood!

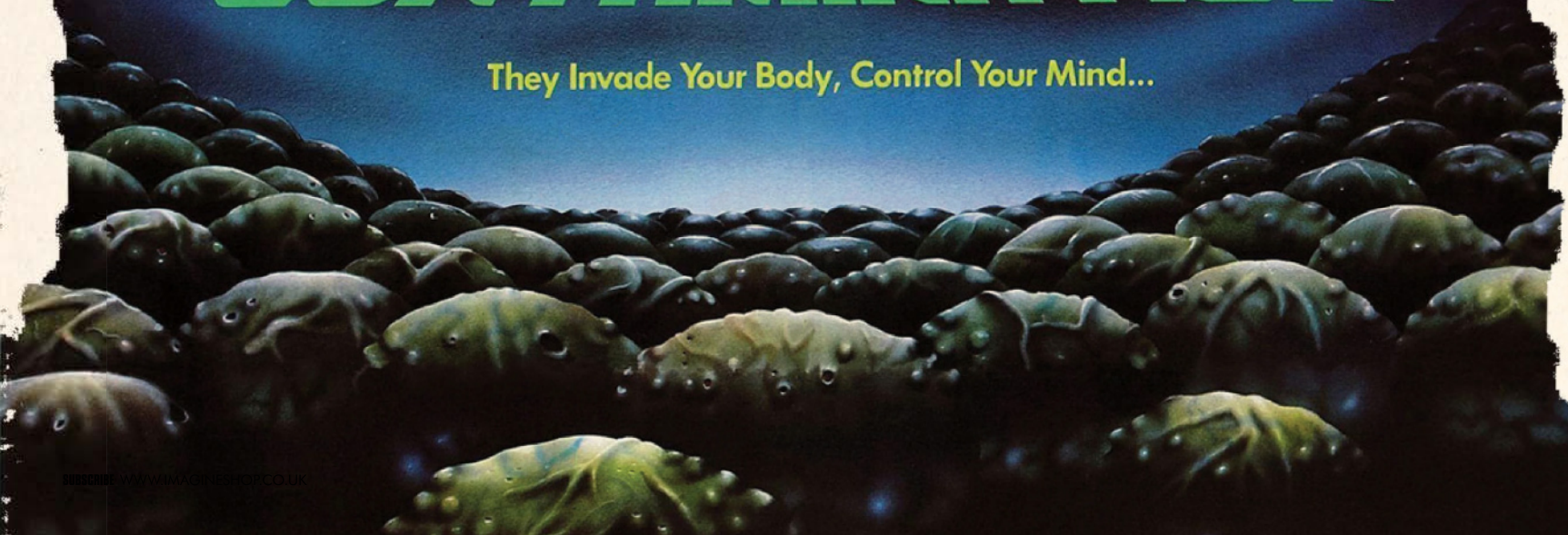
"WE HAD A
RIDICULOUS
ALIEN WITH A
LIGHT-BULB EYE"

LUIGI COZZI



ALIEN CONTAMINATION

They Invade Your Body, Control Your Mind...



➤ feature. In all actuality, nothing could be further from the truth, for this is yet another dose of Snake Plissken silliness. This time, a gang of post-nuclear war survivors come out of hiding to wander around a desolate and deserted Earth. Yet it soon becomes clear that all that has survived the atom bomb are flesh-starved rodents. Not just this, but – as a twist ending reveals – walking, talking, human-sized rodents at that.

Similarly strange is Ruggero Deodato's *The Atlantis Interceptors*, which was made in 1983, but sets its plot in 1994 – even though the director does nothing to change a single thing about the location. Here, scientists discover a rock from what they assume to be the legendary ancient underwater kingdom. Alas, it turns out they have disturbed the sleep of some mutants, who rise from the depths of Atlantis complete with motorbikes, perfectly spoken modern English and bizarre S&M costuming.

"I had been alienated by many film producers since my movie *Cannibal Holocaust* caused so much trouble," mentions Deodato. "But I had done so many different kinds of movies, so I thought this was unfair. So

"DINO WAS VERY HAPPY WITH DANGER: DIABOLIK" LUMBERTO BAVA

with *The Atlantis Interceptors* I got to show I could make this little sci-fi adventure movie in Florida and hopefully regain some of my standing. It was a success when it came out, and it gave me a chance to some other films in this genre later on."

Indeed, Deodato would be one of many who cribbed onto the muscular business that had been achieved by the Arnold Schwarzenegger-starring *Conan The Barbarian* (1982). Along with Cozzi, who gave the world Lou Ferrigno in the diabolically dull *Hercules* (1983), Fulci with *Conquest* (1983) and Joe D'Amato – most famous for his 'video nasty' *Anthropophagous* *The Beast* but hitting pay-dirt with *Ator The Fighting*

Danger: Diabolik remains a cinematic classic.



Eagle (1982) – Deodato's *The Barbarians* (1987) would be one of the biggest hits of the period.

"It was produced by Cannon Films, just like Luigi's movie *Hercules*," continues Deodato. "They had made money with *Hercules*, and *The Barbarians* was supposed to be shot cheap, in Rome, with these identical twin brothers [David and Peter Paul], who were body-builders. Cannon told me to make this violent and serious – just like *Conan*, but the two brothers were not actors, and when I picked them up at the airport the first thing they did was stick their bottoms out of the car window. They were like two little children – they would squabble with each other, work out and chat to women, and I knew that this had to be a comedy. We just played the whole thing for laughs."

In the interim, Hollywood science fiction was beginning to change once more, leading to yet another

chance for film producers in Rome to churn out something that would offer audiences a more cash-starved slant on a familiar trope. James Cameron's *The Terminator*, for instance, would kick-start a new era in adult-orientated, techno-phobic cyberpunk pictures – although, for the budgetary-starved Italians, it merely gave audiences *Hands Of Steel* (1986), directed by an old pro in Sergio Martino.

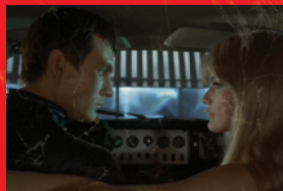
One of Italy's most talented journeymen (previous credits include giallo favourite *Torso*), Martino's *Terminator* take-off has a robot who is 70 per cent cyborg and 30 per cent human programmed to murder a skilled scientist. Yet, unlike Schwarzenegger's one-man army, our robo-fighter finds that his humanity wins out, and he is soon seducing a beautiful motel owner and going into battle against his cold-hearted creators. Oddly, *Hands Of Steel* prefigures *Terminator II* by

THE TOP 10 ITALIAN SCI-FI/FANTASY FILMS



1. PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES (1965)

It is difficult to deny that the look of this misty and malevolent space-shocker was an inspiration to Ridley Scott's major studio effort *Alien*. As such, the reputation of Mario Bava's ground-breaking space-thriller continues to grow with every new xenomorph sequel.



2. DANGER DIABOLIK (1968)

One of Mario Bava's finest achievements, this quick-witted and lavishly composed superhero staple is at turns exciting and also hilarious. In addition, *Diabolik* highlights a scorching Bond-style theme track ('deep, deep down') that once heard is never forgotten).



3. STARCRAH (1978)

Never again will the world see David Hasselhoff as a Jedi wannabe, but thanks to *Starcrash* we have the memories of what could have been. A special mention goes to Caroline Munro's wardrobe people – has a bikini ever been so ill-fitting?



4. THE BRONX WARRIORS (1982)

Enzo Castellari's rental-shop success story is, at times, at least as exciting as John Carpenter's *Escape From New York*. Whizzing along at a breakneck speed, with some authentic locations and a real sense of adventure, this is one of the highlights of Italian sci-fi.



5. ESCAPE FROM THE BRONX (1983)

Also known as *The Bronx Warriors 2*, this is an honourable follow-up that in some ways anticipates *RoboCop*, with its narrative based around knocking down the 'old' parts of a city and replacing the slums with skyscraping apartments, suited only for the rich.

having its man-machine act as a protector to a young woman, although scenes where the metallic marauder self-repairs his own injuries are taken straight from Cameron's trendsetter.



A regular feature in VHS rental stores, *Hands Of Steel* proved popular enough to convince Bruno Mattei – the man behind *Rats: Nights Of Terror* – to attempt his own no-budget riff on the formula. Unfortunately, by the time his 1989 schlock-fest *Shocking Dark* arrived in Italy (briefly unleashed as *Terminator II* until Cameron's legal team got involved) the good old days were over. No longer screening in cinemas, what was left of the proud legacy in Italian B-cinema was now relegated to direct-to-video bin and, within just a couple of years, even that little cottage business would no longer be alive.

"I think we hurt our own film business by cutting costs and trying to make 100 movies that all did the same thing," admits Dardano Sacchetti, whose writing credits also include Umberto Lenzi's Conan-like epic *Ironmaster* (1983), Lamberto Bava's Rambo-rip *Blastfighter* (1984) and *Hands Of Steel*. "With *The Bronx Warriors* it was new and it was fresh, but soon you just had cheaper and cheaper versions of that. It was the same with everything. Then, of course, Roger Corman and Troma began to make movies for the video market, and we just could not compete. Our product was the victim of unscrupulous producers who took most of the money during the boom times and never reinvested when the industry most needed it."

Yet, from his apartment in Rome, no less than Cozzi keeps the flag flying for a hopeful resurgence. "Finally I have a new movie – *Blood On Méliès' Moon*," he smiles. "It is a little bit horror, a little bit sci-fi, a little bit fantasy. It is a crazy story that I have had in my mind for 30 years. So yes, we made it with a low budget, but it is full of enthusiasm and imagination – it is about the birth of cinema and a strange secret that dates back to just before the advent of the first silent movies. But most importantly it is very Italian. Exactly what fans of this genre will expect." 🍷

1990: THE BRONX WARRIOR

The first to do
were the
lucky ones



The best of the space-chasing carnage and fantasy frissons...



6. THE ATLANTIS INTERCEPTORS (1983)

This one begins like *Miami Vice*, complete with a kidnapping on the Florida coast, and then veers into post-apocalyptic territory when the ancient island of Atlantis rises from the sea, complete with *Mad Max*-style punk gangs.



7. THE NEW GLADIATORS (1984)

One of the late Lucio Fulci's least well-known works (hampered by a full-frame DVD that cuts the filmmaker's fluid widescreen photography), this futuristic battle between convicts and immortal television executives is ahead of its time.



8. RATS: NIGHT OF TERROR (1984)

Featuring some appallingly non-PC characterisation (the sole African-American personality is named Chocolate), Bruno Mattei's very, very strange riff on the post-apocalypse trope climaxes with a bestial surprise that is likely to arouse waves of laughter.



9. HANDS OF STEEL (1986)

Not only does *Hands Of Steel* feature the greatest arm wrestling match ever documented; this *Terminator*-influenced action outing just never lets up. Helicopter chases, gun fights and even a robo-dominatrix (anticipating *Terminator 3*) are thrown into the mix.



10. THE BARBARIANS (1987)

Arguably the 'best' of the Italian *Conan* movies, it's a restrained bout of whimsical fantasy. Peter and David Paul can't act to save their life, but watching them awkwardly romance the ladies and battle a low-rent dragon is worth the price of admission alone.



THE MAKING OF

JIM HENSON'S THE STORYTELLER

WE SPEAK TO DUNCAN KENWORTHY, PRODUCER OF THE STORYTELLER, ABOUT ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS AND WORKING WITH THE LATE, GREAT JIM HENSON

WORDS JAMES CLARKE

In the early Seventies, a book was published entitled *The Uses Of Enchantment*. It explored the value of fairy tales in the imaginations of young people, and was written by an educator named Bruno Bettelheim. Over the years, it has become a book that you might have occasionally seen referenced in relation to certain movies of a fantasy and science fiction vintage. Certainly, the enchantment offered by fairy tales was at the heart of the lavishly produced fantasy series *The Storyteller* that was broadcast in the UK way back in 1987.

Our conversation with producer Duncan Kenworthy begins with him describing his own background and how it anticipated some of the ways in which he was the perfect fit for *The Storyteller*. "I'd read English at Cambridge, and so I was very literary," Kenworthy explains, "whereas Jim [Henson] was very visual and not very literary or story-directed. I joined [the Henson

organisation] in 1979, and he died in 1990. I was there to make whatever Jim wanted to have happen, happen. I was very content to be that person, being that close to a man who's the only person I think I've ever described as a genius. He had a genius, whatever that word really means. He was such a gentle man, but he had spirit, taste and creativity, and a perspective on the world that was very unusual and extraordinary. This gentle mind had a major impact, and everyone felt it. It was just a privilege to be there and interpret what he wanted to other people. He got quite comfortable with my being in charge of what happened in England because he had to spend a lot of time in New York."

Kenworthy goes on to set the scene for how the conditions were right for a lavish, new, Henson-produced, fantasy-themed TV series. "After *The Dark Crystal* and *Fraggle Rock*, things started to coalesce in London as a production centre for Henson. Every so often, Jim would come over from New York, and we'd

sit and talk about what sort of ideas we had come up with to develop. One of the ideas had come from Jim's daughter, Lisa, who now runs the Henson Company in the States. Lisa, when she was probably 15 or 16, worked on *The Dark Crystal* or *Labyrinth*, photocopying and making coffee, and then she went on to be a student at Harvard in folklore. That was part of her course at any rate, and she said, 'Why not do a series about storytelling?' It wasn't about fairy tales so much as about storytelling. So Jim talked to me about this, and I leapt on it. Jim talked about what we could do, and I made notes and wrote up a treatment, and then we pitched it. So that's how it developed.

"The thing that drove Jim and piqued his interest was fairy tales full of imagery: a horse gallops so fast it was as fast as an arrow, say. Lisa said, 'What if, because TV can do that, you showed a horse transforming into an arrow, or you brought that sort of imagery to life visually? That excited Jim, because the moment you said to him, 'No one's ever done that before,' he was there. He wanted to be the first. So this visual trickery was an integral part of the concept. It wasn't just dramatising a narrative, as if a folk tale or fairy tale is nothing more than a series of events; it was bringing a tale to life in a visual, almost visceral, way that could render metaphorical language concrete."

As we talk, Kenworthy brings off the shelf a copy of Stith Thompson's book, *The Types Of Folktale*, and explains that in developing the scripts, "this was our bible. We used this as a sort of reference point."

Kenworthy then goes on to recollect how *The Storyteller* evolved from its initial concept to being developed into scripts. The first writer to be brought on board was Anthony Minghella, who would go on to direct fantasy romance *Truly, Madly, Deeply* and the movie adaptations of contemporary literary classics *The English Patient* and *Cold Mountain*. At the time of being assigned *The Storyteller*, Minghella had written his first TV drama, entitled *What If It's Raining*, which covered the topic of divorce. It was clearly a long way from the concerns of *The Storyteller*. ➤

Growing up in the Eighties, *The Storyteller* was a staple of many childhoods.







BEHIND THE SCENES

JIM HENSON'S THE STORYTELLER

➤ "I met him," Kenworthy recalls, "and drew him into the Henson world. [Anthony] wrote the pilot script, which was fantastic. Jim had this idea of the Storyteller sitting by the fire with a dog. He'd always intended the dog to be real. When Anthony wrote the script, the dog talked! We had no intention that the dog would talk, and it was a complete misunderstanding, because Anthony said, 'I just assumed it was Jim Henson: of course the dog talks!' When Jim read this he thought, 'He's one of us.' It was a complete accident, but it turned into a great double act: the Storyteller and the talking dog. The dog speaks for the child in the audience and asks the straight emotional questions: 'Wasn't he afraid?' 'But what happened then?' 'Oh, that poor thing.' He was sympathetic, and the Storyteller treated him so carefully, as if he were a child."

Kenworthy's has fond memories of the writing process. "The scriptwriting was one of the most pleasurable experiences of my life, because it was really just me and Anthony coming up with what I think were some of the best scripts seen on television in those two years; so imaginatively conceived. He came up with a new sort of poetic language. We were bonded by those nine scripts and nine productions, which we both cared so passionately about for two years or more. And it's perhaps not surprising that he became my closest friend. He was a truly remarkable person, as everyone in the world now knows. Having Jim join forces with Anthony was great. It changed both of them in some ways. He loved Jim, and it was mutual."

Kenworthy observes that Minghella's richly expressed dialogue and characterisation "was one of the reasons why John [Hurt] took the job." He notes, "The script was just such a standout, the erudition, if you like, the poetry that went into the narration and the character."

Kenworthy then goes on to explain how production began with the pilot. "At that point, I could not take the time away to produce the series, so as a way of reinforcing the story element – as opposed to just the visuals and Europeanness – I brought in Mark Shivas. I said to Jim, 'Why don't we get Mark to come in and produce; so, he produced the pilot episode 'Hans My Hedgehog'. Mark brought with him the stature within the British television establishment of people who would be prepared to work with this American company." Of his own role, Kenworthy explains, "Doing the series of *The Storyteller*, I was very much in between the UK, and our sort of European spirit and ethos of Grimm's Fairy Tales, and NBC who were all about thresholds of what you could and could not show on television."

The Storyteller was shot at the regular Henson studio base at Elstree. Kenworthy acknowledges, "It was very, very imaginative, and actually groundbreaking at that time. The key person was Steve Barron, who made his reputation at that point by having directed the Michael Jackson music video for 'Billie Jean'. He was a young English guy, and we got him involved."

"His idea was not using what used to be called chroma-key, against blue screen, and then that developed into green screen. Instead of doing that, he

said his idea was to go back to some eastern European films, like *The Singing Ringing Tree*, and shoot people in silhouette against white backgrounds. If you could justify what the background was, then it was a completely credible image, because the bleeding around the edge was because it was backlit. So we had this idea of having silhouettes come to life, and that was, in a way, why the Storyteller had a fire. There are shots where you go into the flame and then you see characters in silhouette against the flame."

Kenworthy notes their ambition, "[was] to try and come up with a different way of telling a story. The Storyteller would kick it off, but then, instead of simply ransacking the tales themselves, we wanted to find a way of rendering the texture of a fairy tale, which is more than just simply the basic 'Once upon a time...'"

Each episode took about six days to film. "Jim's episodes, like 'The Soldier And Death', took longer than others. It was the same director of photography for each series. It was John Fenner on *The Storyteller*, with Roger Pratt taking over on *The Greek Myths*. The director changed for every episode, but everyone else stayed the same, which made me a little more central to the operation, because each director came in as a newbie, and there were certain things that were givens."

He happily recalls the experience of overseeing the music composed for the series. *The Storyteller* was an early project for Rachel Portman, who would go on to a well-regarded career composing music for film and television. Of the collaboration with Portman, he calls

"WHEN JIM READ
THE SCRIPT HE
THOUGHT, 'HE'S
ONE OF US'"

DUNCAN KENWORTHY



JIM HENSON'S THE STORYTELLER

BEHIND THE SCENES



Inside the legendary Henson Creature Workshop.



The Gorgon animatronic character from *Greek Myths* episode 'Perseus And The Gorgon'.



Hurt alongside Kenworthy and Jim Henson himself.

CASTING THE STORYTELLER

KENWORTHY ON THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PROSTHETICS

In developing the most effective way to realise *The Storyteller*, there had been a period of time when the Storyteller character had been considered as an animatronic puppet character. "I've got a photograph somewhere of a character from *Labyrinth* who looks like the Storyteller," Kenworthy recalls. "So I think that would have been an idea of Jim's." The idea then evolved into having a person portray the Storyteller, and John Hurt essayed the role, his face quite heavily masked by prosthetic make-up. "You might say we got the best of both worlds – we had the power of John's storytelling, which was crucial, but half-turned him into a Henson creature." *The Storyteller* series was notable as much for its casting as for its animatronic characters. Notable actors included Bob Peck in the episode 'The Soldier And Death', Miranda Richardson in 'The Three Ravens' and Alison Doody in 'Sapsorrow'. In *Greek Myths*, the Storyteller character was portrayed by Michael Gambon. In this series actors bringing the ancient world to life included Derek Jacobi as Daedalus and David Morrissey as Theseus.



John Hurt memorably starred as the title character.

it, "Another fantastic thing. She and I would have a meeting where she played the themes for each episode, I would go to her apartment, and she would sit at her piano, and almost with one hand play the piece of music. One of the other really enjoyable parts of the series was the day when she recorded the music."

"It was highly praised." Kenworthy says of both *The Storyteller* and spin-off series *The Greek Myths*, and even though the series didn't quite find the audience that had been hoped for in the UK, it was very popular in Japan. Kenworthy notes, "When we did the first series, the Japanese did a promotional book, which was very nicely done." Very much more recently, *The Storyteller* has found a new burst of life in comic-book form.

As we sit, we are surrounded by various photos and books from Kenworthy's time working with Henson. "I'm very proud," he says. "I think it's really complex and strangely beguiling." With a smile, he adds, "One my greatest pleasures, one of the greatest honours of all, was that Bruno Bettelheim admired *The Storyteller*."



Jim Henson's *The Storyteller: The Complete Collection* is available to buy on DVD now, distributed by Sony.

IT'S TROMA'S MASTERPIECE, THE VERY BEST IN SCHLOCK AND AWE! HE'S THE HERO WE NEED RIGHT NOW, THE GUY TO PUNISH EVIL, CORRUPTION, AND PEOPLE WHO STEAL OLD LADIES' CARS! JOIN US AS WE TAKE A TRIP TO TROMAVILLE AND CELEBRATE THE ONE AND ONLY TOXIE!

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

TOXIC AVENGER



Film

RUNNING TIME:

82 minutes

RELEASE DATE:

11 April 1986

DIRECTORS:

Michael Herz,
Lloyd Kaufman

WRITERS: Joe Ritter, Lloyd

Kaufman, Gay Terry,
Stuart Strutin

CAST: Mitch Coren, Mark

Torgl, Andree Maranda,
Gary Schneider

About

Melvin Junko is a dweeby mop-boy at Tromaville's most popular health club, hated by the evil fitness freaks that go there. After a cruel prank, Melvin falls through a window and into a vat of toxic waste. He undergoes a painful transformation that sees him become taller, more muscular, and possessed with an unstoppable urge to punish evildoers. He starts with the small-time crooks who litter the back alleys of the New York 'burg, but his do-gooding makes the absurdly corrupt authorities nervous, especially as they're looking at dumping even more toxic waste in the area. Can Toxie take them on while looking after his new girlfriend, and making sure his violent urges are restricted to the bad guys?

For schlock fans, Troma movies are the stuff of legend. The low-budget production company crew are an industry and a sub-genre unto themselves. Beloved by genre fans for their homemade aesthetic and cheery approach to gore, nudity and giddy laughs, their crowning achievement remains 1984's *The Toxic Avenger*. It not only created an icon in its disfigured, ultraviolent but sweet-hearted hero; it's the perfect showcase for their mad blend of cartoonish carnage, slapstick, social commentary and exploitation.

Troma was still in its fledgling stages when Kaufman struck upon the idea for the character that would become the face of the company. At the time, he was freelancing for other New York-set films, while working on the pre-production of John G Avildsen's *Rocky*. Having spent a lot of time in health clubs and gyms as the Stallone classic geared up for filming, the idea of setting a schlock movie in one of these locations took root. When he read an article proclaiming that horror movies were

over, he decided that this was the genre he wanted to work in.

Describing *The Toxic Avenger* as a horror movie isn't accurate; it's a superhero comedy. The character of Toxie is one driven by his desire to fight evil, whether it's in the form of a pimp trying to sell him a kidnapped 12-year-old girl ("You said you were going to take me to the David Bowie concert. He's not David Bowie!") or the town's bloated, corrupt mayor. He helps little old ladies cross the street, opens jars of popcorn for struggling housewives, and stops kids being mown down by lunatic hit-and-run drivers. The movie loves Toxie, and we do too.

But the film doesn't start with our radioactive waste-scarred superhero. Like all origin stories, it begins with his ordinary, humdrum existence. This being a Troma movie, everything is pushed into ludicrous excess, including our hero's utterly pathetic state. Melvin Junko (Mark Torgl) is the dweeby mop-boy at the Tromaville health centre, and is reviled by its resident fitness freaks. The opening title sequence takes us through the various aerobiscisers, weight-

lifters and body-image perfectionists that the film finds both hilarious and fascinating. This skewed take on the Eighties' obsession with lycra-clad fitness hunters is very much part of its charm, showing a John Waters-esque disdain for anyone so desperate to fit in.



While Melvin gawks, squeals and pratfalls, we get much more of an introduction to the four villainous hardbodies. The gang is led by the perpetually on-edge Bozo (Gary Schneider), his girlfriend Julie (Cindy Manion) and his friends Slug (Robert Prichard) and Wanda (Jennifer Babbitt). Just in case we're in any doubt about how monstrous they are, we're shown how they like to go out driving, looking for people to run over. Just as they discuss the scoring system (riddled with hateful racial epithets, just to really drive that home), we see an older sister waving her little brother off on his bike. Things don't end well for that kid. Kaufman and co-director Michael ➤

"THE CHARACTER OF TOXIE IS ONE DRIVEN BY HIS DESIRE TO FIGHT EVIL"



Toxie's all heart, in addition to being a super-strong mutant vigilante.

THE TOXIC AVENGER

RETRO CLASSIC



Melvin, mid-transformation and halfway to becoming the ultimate crime-fighter.



The film gleefully satirises the obsessive get-fit culture of the Eighties.



Poor Melvin is tricked into making out with a sheep, but it'll get worse for him.

CLASSIC QUOTES

"ALL RIGHT EVERYBODY, DROP YOUR TACOS OR I'LL BLOW YOUR BRAINS OUT"

LEROY

"YOU FAT SLOB. LET'S SEE IF YOU'VE GOT ANY GUTS"
THE TOXIC AVENGER

"FOR YOUR INFORMATION, EVERYONE KNOWS MONSTERS PREFER BLONDES"
BRUCE

"NOW WE'RE GOING TO GIVE YOU SIX NEW ASSHOLES. COMPLIMENTS OF ME, CIGAR FACE!"
CIGAR FACE

"A LITTLE MOTHER, WITH A LITTler BABY. YOU LIKE MEXICAN FOOD LITTler BABY? WELL, HOW'D YOU LIKE THESE HOT TAMALES SHOVED DOWN YOUR THROAT?"
LEROY

"MY LITTLE MELVIN. HE MUST HAVE FINALLY HIT PUBERTY"
MELVIN'S MOM

"MOPS? MUST BE SOME KIND OF POLITICAL STATEMENT"
CHIEF OF POLICE

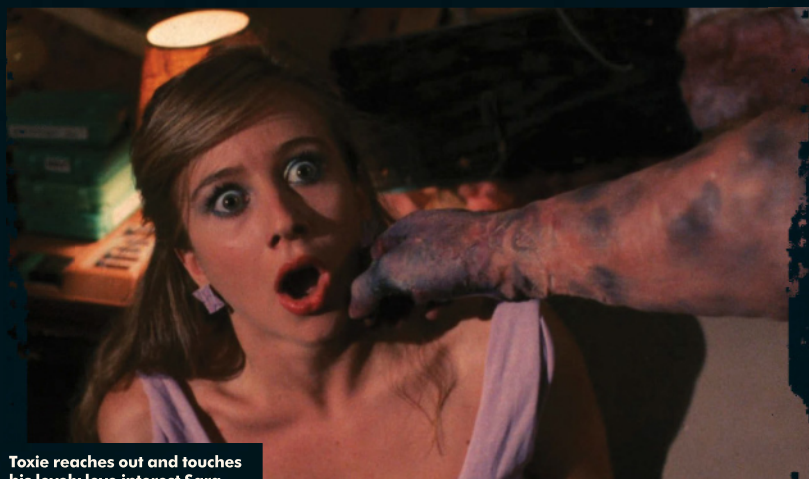
"YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO TAKE ME TO THE DAVID BOWIE CONCERT. HE'S NOT DAVID BOWIE!"
KANSAS RUNAWAY

"DUMB MOP BOY, HE CAN'T EVEN MOP RIGHT"
BOZO

"HE'S STRESSIN' ME JULIE, HE'S STRESSIN' ME!"
BOZO

"WELL, I GOTTA GET UP EARLY IN THE MORNIN'. GOTTA GO TO CHURCH"
SLUG

It wouldn't be Troma without this kind of thing.



Toxie reaches out and touches his lovely love interest Sara.

➤ Herz show him flying over the bonnet, crawling across the tarmac and finally getting his head burst under the tyres of the reversing car (because you don't get any points if they're still breathing). The effect is absolutely grotesque, and it's so totally cartoonish that you're in no doubt about the filmmakers' intent. This is audible reaction cinema.

Shortly afterwards, the gang sets on a plan to humiliate Melvin in the worst way possible. Julie informs him that she wants to screw him, and tells him to meet her wearing something pink. The poor sap ends up wearing a tutu and making out with a sheep in a wig in full view of the entire health club membership. The despairing Melvin flees and ends up jumping out of a window and into a barrel of toxic waste on the back of a truck conveniently parked outside. And thus the transformation begins, as Melvin writhes, smokes and screams, and Bozo bellows that he's faking and can't take a joke.

The full change takes place with some impressively bubbly skin effects in the bathtub, and that's the last we see of Melvin. He becomes Toxie, a giant, muscle-bound but surprisingly articulate creature of vengeance. In one of the film's most unforgettable sequences he takes out the three violent crooks holding up a Mexican restaurant. It's also one of the most tasteless sequences in the whole film, mostly due to the introduction of the blind Sara (Andree Maranda). Interestingly, it was the shooting of her Seeing Eye dog

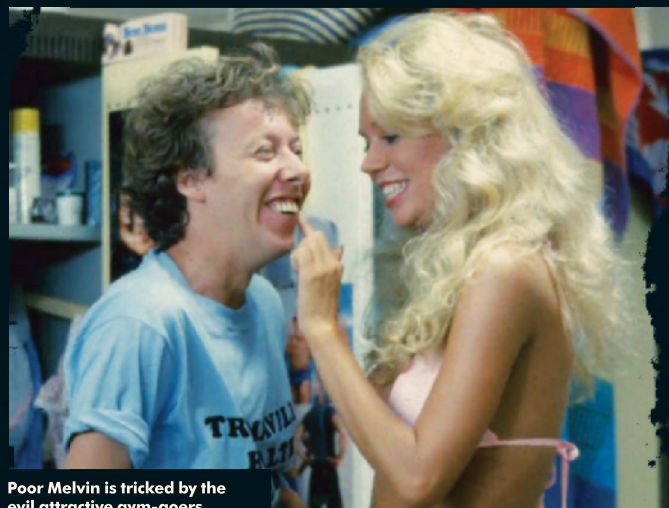
that incensed viewers rather than the threat of imminent rape that she faces before Toxie shows up to dispose of these troublemakers, using all of the tools a restaurant kitchen allows.



However, for all the gore and gross-out-ness, the love story between Toxie and Sara is crucial, giving *The Toxic Avenger* its weird heart. The fact that Kaufman and Herz treat their budding romance with the same sense of gleeful silliness with which they show Bozo and Slug beating up an old woman and stealing her car really contributes to the sense that the filmmakers' intentions are in no way malicious. The two fall into a romantic idyll almost instantly, and suddenly Toxie's hideout is covered in bright yellow flowers as the two hold hands, go on rambling walks through the countryside together and share a post-coital cigarette.

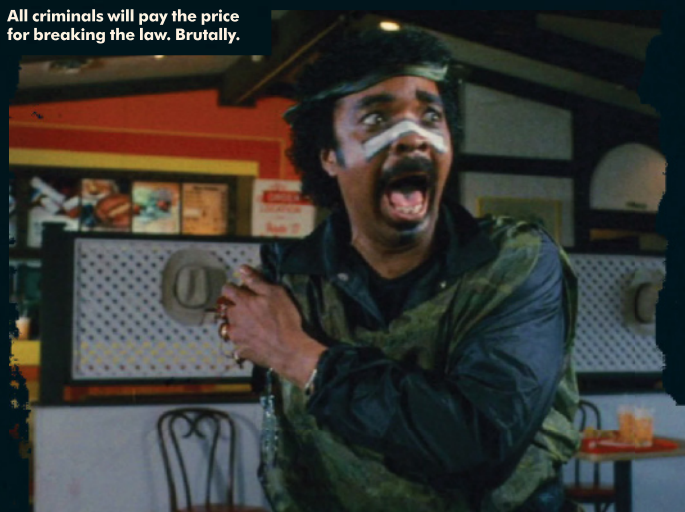
Inevitably, such happiness can't last, and Toxie begins to worry that he won't be able to stop himself from inflicting violence on people who don't deserve it. In one of the film's few indefensible sequences, he throws a small woman into a drying machine at a laundrette, weirdly quipping "No ticky, no washy" as he flicks the switch. It's a scattershot movie by its very nature, and this is one of the examples of something not working.

With the exception of the occasional taste misstep, there's very little about



Poor Melvin is tricked by the evil attractive gym-goers.

All criminals will pay the price for breaking the law. Brutally.



BEYOND TOXIE

5 Troma movies that you absolutely need to see

CLASS OF NUKE 'EM HIGH (1986)



1 A gang of school kids are turned into mutants by radioactive water in this mid-Eighties follow-up to *The Toxic Avenger*.

COMBAT SHOCK (1986)



2 One of the most interesting films on the Troma roster, this movie is about an Agent Orange-scarred Vietnam veteran.

SURF NAZIS MUST DIE (1987)



3 After an earthquake destroys California, a bunch of Neo-Nazis take over the waves. They must be stopped!

"THERE'S LITTLE ABOUT THE TOXIC AVENGER THAT'S NOT ENDEARING"

The Toxic Avenger that's not endearing. Its scrappiness is all part of its charm, something that's hammered home by the various incredible stories from its micro-budget production. The fact that a homeless man stole a prop gun and attempted to rob the crew with it while they were shooting the Shinbone Alley sequence is amazing, as is the fact that the sheep that Melvin makes out with was riddled with lice, and nobody told the actor this until after the scene was completed.

And it's also endearing because hidden under all the fake blood and bikini-clad dancing girls is a certain amount of social commentary. In addition to skewering the characters' ludicrous devotion to the gym, the toxic waste dumping in the New York area is presented as something that the Tromaville mayor and police captain are not only complicit in, but actually find hilarious. Pat Ryan is wonderful as the ludicrously corrupt mayor, seen at one point lying nearly naked on a table with a sandwich the length of his entire body.

Naturally, the Mayor gets his comeuppance in appropriately gory style, as Toxie tells him "Let's see if you've got any guts," and promptly punches into his stomach to pull out his intestines.

Kaufman and Herz would return to Toxie twice more to complete the trilogy, while Kaufman would direct a fourth movie solo in 2000. The Troma brand grew and grew, although it would take a big knock with the expensive flop *Troma's War*, and Toxie remains their most enduring property. It has stuck around to such an extent that Akiva Goldsman was linked to a family-friendly remake/reboot/reimagining directed by *Hot Tub Time Machine*'s Steve Pink and potentially starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as a helpful stranger who trains Toxie. What's weird is that a family-friendly reboot could actually work. While we obviously love the violence and the schlocky elements, it's Toxie's heart inside



his monstrous exterior that makes him special (and, to be honest, we'd want to keep the schlock). [@](#)

CHOPPER CHICKS IN ZOMBIETOWN (1989)



4 Billy Bob Thornton and Martha Quinn star in this schlocker about a group of female bikers in town run by an evil scientist.

CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL (1997)



5 Uncle Lloyd picked up *South Park* duo Trey Parker and Matt Stone's hilarious debut about famed frontier cannibal Alferd Packer.

YOUR TAKE ON THE CLASSIC

WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



"Toxie is CRAY-CRAY hot 'n sexy!" [@RocketXQueenX](#)



"Watching the first #ToxicAvenger at 2am on a Saturday morning with a Pot Noodle is the closest I get to euphoria." [@DuckyStrkesBack](#)



"One of the most awesome films ever! It makes me smile!" [@thebigdufus](#)



"I really enjoyed the cartoon series." [@rockingrhys](#)



"It went on to make Toxie a cheap splatter B-movie icon, but the first movie now is very poor. But it led to Troma greatness." [@ParsonsFiction](#)



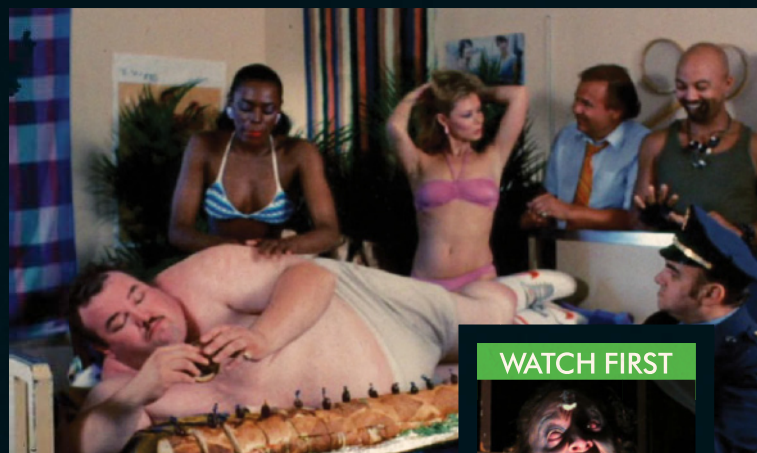
"classic forever!!!!" [@IMclad](#)



"Never caught on to the movie, but I had almost every toxic crusaders toy. Fantastic stuff! Rocking theme as well." [@ForgottenRomeo](#)



"I think it's really weird that they made a Saturday morning children's cartoon based on the movie. Different times." [@TheSpoilist](#)



WATCH FIRST



EVIL DEAD (1981)

Sam Raimi's homemade horror showed that you could have plenty of splatter for next to no money.

WATCH NEXT



TROMEO AND JULIET (1996)

James Gunn made his writing debut on this Lloyd Kaufman-directed spin on Bill Shakespeare's classic.





STRONG VIOLENCE/GORE
AND LANGUAGE

FLASHBACK

THE DESCENT

A DECADE ON FROM ITS RELEASE, NEIL MARSHALL'S CAVERN SHOCKER REMAINS A DEEPLY HAUNTING AND CLAUSTROPHOBIC EXPERIENCE. WE TALK TO LEAD ACTRESS SHAUNA MACDONALD ABOUT FILMING THE ALL-TOO-RARE FEMALE ENSEMBLE HORROR FLICK

WORDS OLIVER PFEIFFER

After making an impression in 2002 with his down-and-dirty squaddies-werewolf horror debut *Dog Soldiers*, Neil Marshall made a real impact with his second feature: cave shocker *The Descent*, a visceral, more than just 'chick-with-picks' flick that provoked intensely claustrophobic chills upon its release in 2005.

It concerns six friends who embark upon a caving expedition deep beneath the Appalachian Mountains, but happen upon more than they planned for when they become trapped in an uncharted cavern and find themselves hunted by ravenous prehistoric creatures. On the surface, what may appear like yet another creature feature quickly becomes a morally complex endurance test.

"I go on such a physical and emotional journey where my character's moral dilemmas and the choices she makes are surprising. It's very rare that you do all those things in one film – especially a horror film," explains Shauna Macdonald, who played grieving lead Sarah, who loses both her husband and daughter during a shockingly sudden car crash at the outset. "Neil Marshall wanted to make the characters as rounded and realistic as possible, so when things start to go wrong for them the audience really cared and nobody was simply picked off to further the story."



To authenticate the characters' relationships to each other, two weeks were set aside before filming for the cast to go on their own expeditions. "We learnt white-water rafting, undertook some climbing training, went caving for real and did some off-road driving too – all these things instantly bond a group of people," continues Macdonald. "That's why big companies send their employers off on these group bonding sessions, because as soon as you're up a mountain or a wall at a climbing centre and someone is holding your rope, the communication between you becomes very clear and you instantly bond because of the nature of what you're doing. We were put in these situations where we were forced to show our vulnerability and trust each other."

Clever casting played an integral part in ensuring there was equal footing between the characters too.

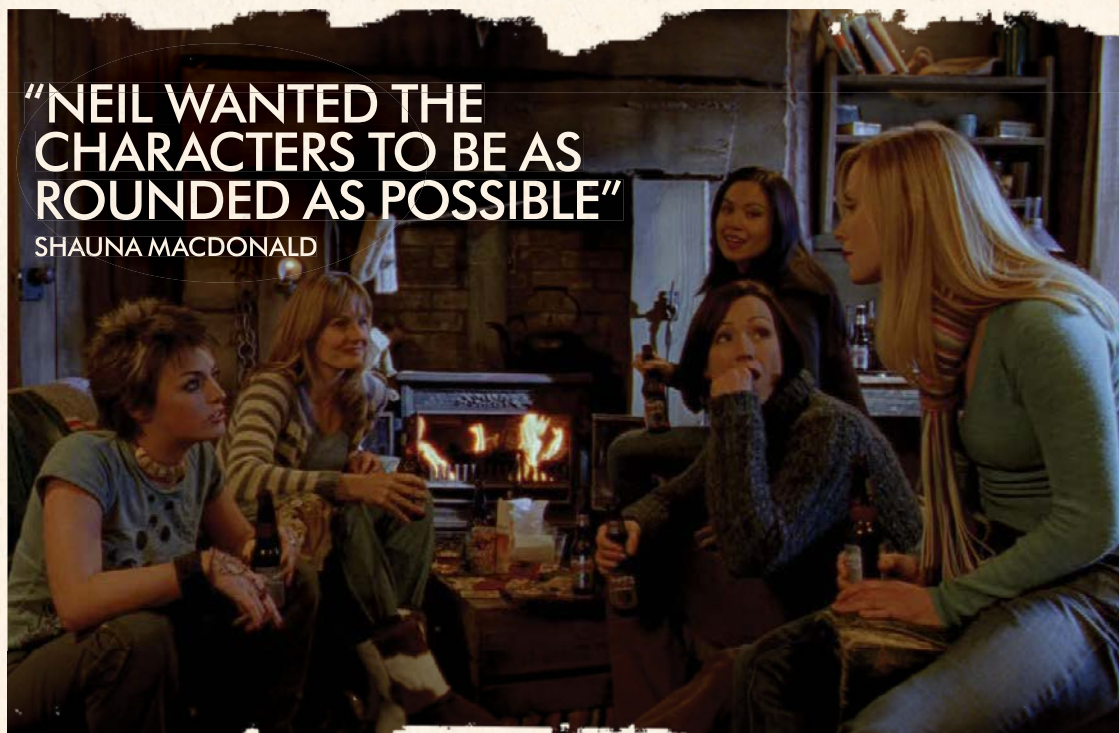
"Neil didn't get any [big names cast]; he made sure that we were all on a par with each other, so there was no competition in that sense – everybody was coming to it at the same level," acknowledges the actress.

The authenticity was strengthened by the shooting conditions. Although filming didn't take place within an actual cave setting, conditions inside an ultra-realistic cave structure were gruelling enough to ensure there was realism in the performances. "They were huge sets, and throughout the course of the film the situation gets worse... so you go from nice and dry cathedral-like caverns to very small, claustrophobic wet caverns, and you're getting more and more exhausted because you're working really hard, and it's freezing," elaborates Macdonald. "So it was physically difficult too, but exhilarating. Because we were all young, free and single then, we could throw ourselves completely into it. We just went for it, and were loving the ride!"

One of the most memorably agonising sequences in *The Descent* – before any four-legged threats enter the scene – is the moment a panic-stricken Sarah becomes lodged and seemingly stuck in a tight crawlspace; the sheer dilemma is eerily palpable thanks to the convincingly confined production design and gutsy performances from both Macdonald and Alex Reid, who plays her reassuring friend Beth. "We are very proud of that scene, because we had to ADR everything due to the scratchy sound the polystyrene set made when we rubbed our bodies against it," recalls the actress. "I don't like doing ADR. I like to emotionally commit in the moment, so it's always tricky to go back and find what you found previously in the cold, wet studio at Pinewood acting opposite your mate... then attempting to replicate that moment in a sound studio after you've just had a Latte! So when we came to do the ADR, we were on the ground in the sound studio all ➤

"NEIL WANTED THE CHARACTERS TO BE AS ROUNDED AS POSSIBLE"

SHAUNA MACDONALD



➤ curled up pretending we were back in that scene again. It sounds a bit crazy, but it works!”

Raw realism was also imaginatively achieved during the first spooky sighting of the antagonistic crawlers. Mischievously, Marshall kept their appearance a mystery from his cast until their characters actually discover them for themselves – which uniquely helped to capture those shock reactions for real. “He created a huge feeling of suspense, which caused us a lot of anxiety because we would talk about [the creatures], but we never went into what they would look like, so they became this mystery,” reveals Macdonald. “He wanted to ensure that when we did finally meet it would be on camera.”

Due to the nature of the filmmaking beast, the actress did get a sneak peak. “Because we shot it chronologically, my character does get a glimpse before the other girls, and when they actually meet the crawler it’s through the POV of a camcorder that Sarah’s holding – obviously the director-of-photography operates the camcorder, so I got to sit back and watch the girls do it,” says the actress. “What happened was they positioned the girls, ran their sequence, turned off the lights and brought in Craig [Conway – who is credited as crawler ‘Scar’] under a blanket. He was crouched down, and then suddenly appears behind them – it was just horrifically scary! The girls were so overwhelmed with everything that they bolted off the stage and headed for the fire exit!” laughs Macdonald. “Up until that point we’d given the impression that we were fairly hardy, not-scared-of-anything-actresses. I think Neil wanted to create this mystery and suspense – the horror of it fuelled our performances.”



Despite being essentially a creature feature, at its heart *The Descent* is about how these close friendships progressively become fractured following their altercation in the cave, and how these horrific circumstances tear the group apart both physically and emotionally. The most significant dynamic is between Sarah and her feisty, egocentric friend Juno (Natalie Mendoza) who, it is revealed, had an affair with Sarah’s husband Paul prior to his untimely death. This betrayal is revealed during a pivotal moment in the story, where Juno has left Beth (Alex Reid) for dead after inadvertently stabbing her in the neck with a pickaxe following an adrenaline-induced fight with the crawlers. Later, Sarah stumbles upon a still-breathing Beth, who presents her with a necklace that she tore off Juno during the incident that bares her late husband’s motto. She consequently warns Sarah that Juno cannot be trusted.

The significance of this scene finally hits a crescendo where an enraged Carrie-esque avenging Sarah finally confronts Juno about the liaison, with chilling consequences. However, perhaps her anger is fuelled more by recent incidents.

“She’s in a very vulnerable position and certainly in the depth of grief,” explains Macdonald. “But for Sarah in that moment I thought, ‘Okay, [Juno] had an affair with my husband, but leaving Beth to die by herself was worse.’ At the end I let her know that she was with my husband, but underlying that was ‘You left Beth to die, so now that’s going to be your fate!’ The moral choices

“THE HORROR OF THE SITUATION FUELLED OUR PERFORMANCES”

SHAUNA MACDONALD



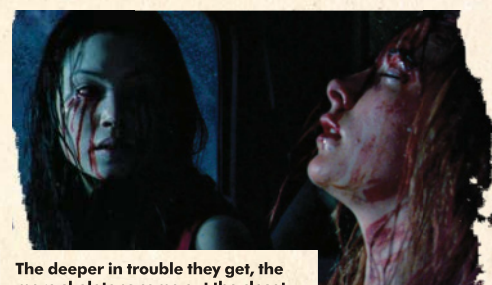
are questionable,” she observes. “Some people think Sarah rightfully got her revenge, other people think she’d gone mad, while others thought she should never have done that. That Juno/Sarah divide is interesting.”

Another pivotal character transformation that Macdonald says was in the script but, due to physical filming restrictions, was possibly lost on the audience, came with the inclusion of a family of crawlers – the child of which is ultimately killed by Sarah. “That was the change, that I’d killed this child... but because I couldn’t stand up straight in the set you couldn’t really tell that the boy was much shorter than me, so that was a big loss, which I thought was a shame,” explains the actress. “To see Sarah, the bereaved mother, killing a child crawler and then the mother of that crawler coming to attack [me]... I thought that was quite a nice detail.”

The production was under considerable pressure for a quick turnaround in order to be released before a rival caving film called *The Cave*. Although made in time, Marshall and the team needn’t have worried – *The Cave* contained a distinct lack of character building and a host



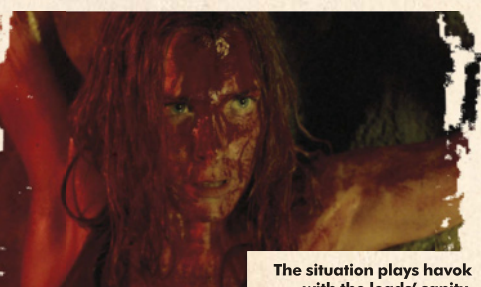
The Descent sees a caving trip quickly go wrong.



The deeper in trouble they get, the more skeletons come out the closet.



Intriguingly, the ending was left open for interpretation.



The situation plays havoc with the leads' sanity.

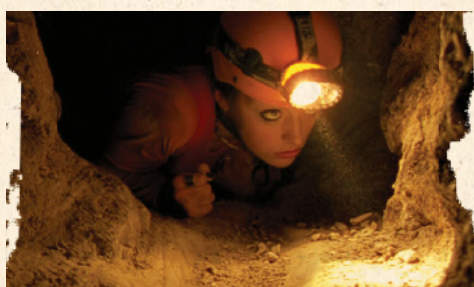
of redundant genre clichés that the filmmaker expertly and purposely avoided in his film. "It had a fairly similar setup, but luckily for us it wasn't as good as a film," acknowledges Macdonald rather modestly.

Indeed, the far superior *The Descent* wiped the floor with *The Cave*, becoming both a box office and critical success, while obtaining a slew of welcome awards, including a Saturn Award win for Best Horror Film, (Macdonald was nominated for Best Actress) and a British Independent Film Award win for Best Director.

Originality and grueling tension, in addition to an inventively daring and unpredictable conclusion, helped secure *The Descent* subsequent cult horror film status as well. "To have a group of females that are so bonded and looking out for each other at the start turn into these primal, in-it-for-themselves survival beings toward the end, along with the journey it took them to get there, seemed to make sense," considers Macdonald. "Even though we're females, we unexpectedly go the other way and fight for our own survival." 🦎



The set was elaborate and convincingly claustrophobic.



THE DESCENT PART 2

SHAUNA MACDONALD ON WHY EVENTS DIDN'T EXACTLY PAN OUT FOR THE SEQUEL

Following the critical and commercial success of *The Descent*, it was perhaps inevitable that a sequel would eventually surface. This was despite the fact that Neil Marshall's film ended with a particularly poetic denouncement where Sarah is, at least in her mind, reunited inside the cave with her dead daughter Jessie.

As Shauna Macdonald reveals, an opening sequence for *Part 2* was shot. The sequence not only revealed exactly how Sarah managed to escape a gruesome, underground demise, but also gave a justifiable reason for why she would conceivably descend back into the cave that had brought such torment to her and her friends.

"I found it quite difficult to justify Sarah's actions. I said, 'Why would she go back to the cave?' She just wouldn't do it!" explains Macdonald. "However, we shot an entire sequence that was to be a dramatic beginning for *The Descent: Part 2*."

The actress describes a sequence that follows on from the last shot of *The Descent* – where the same imaginary figure that resembles Sarah's daughter Jessie takes her mother's hand and pulls her down into an abyss. The abyss ends up being an underground river that drags and almost drowns Sarah, who ultimately gets washed out and burst into a lake.

"I thought, 'Okay it's a dramatic beginning and it makes sense and I like the fact that she still thinks her daughter is in there somehow, and that can be the tip – the thing that pushes her in that doubt, that psychosis.'"

However, the actress got a surprise when she sat down to watch the film at London's FrightFest. "I explained how Sarah had gotten out of the cave, how dramatic it was and I talked about my daughter. Then I sat down to watch the movie and it's all gone!" she explains. "I'm running down the hill and I bump into the pickup truck, and for me I knew what sort of film I was going to watch after that."

Despite admitting to having a fun shoot, which happily reunited her with most of the cast and crew from the original production (with *The Descent* editor Jon Harris taking over directorial duties), Macdonald has mixed feelings regarding how the sequel panned out.

"Natalie and I wanted to stay really true to our characters, and I felt we were fighting against something a lot of the time for *Descent: Part 2*," she admits. "It felt like we were shooting a sequel. Then it was like, 'Let's bring out the amnesia card!'"





THE SCIFINOW STAR WARS PREQUELS QUIZ

DO YOU KNOW THE STAR WARS PREQUELS LIKE THE BACK OF YOUR LIGHTSABER, OR HAVE YOU ERASED THEM FROM YOUR MEMORY ARCHIVES? FIND OUT WITH OUR QUIZ!

HARD TO QUIZ, THE DARK SIDE IS

1. Who is the Supreme Chancellor of the Galactic Republic at the start of the film?
2. What is the name of the handmaiden who acted as a decoy for Queen Amidala?
3. What type of alien is junk dealer and human trafficker Watto?
4. Who is Shmi, and what does she have to do with the *Star Wars* universe?
5. Who recruits General Grievous to lead the Separatist Droid Army?

THERE IS NO TRY, ONLY QUIZ

6. What is the name of the settlement where Anakin lived with his mother on Tatooine?
7. What planet is Jango Fett from?
8. Where is the Jedi Council based?
9. Under which lake is Otoh Gunga located?
10. What is the name of Nute Gunray's homeworld?

QUIZ LEADS TO SUFFERING

11. Who officiates Anakin and Padmé's wedding?
12. How long did Anakin take to finish the Podrace?

13. What is Palpatine's first name?
14. What is the name of the librarian in the Jedi Archives?
15. What are Darth Vader's first words?

FEEL THE QUIZ

16. Which *Acorn Antiques* star cameos as pilot Bravo Five in Episode I?
17. Who composed the score for all three films?
18. Who co-wrote the Episode II script with Lucas?
19. Which prequel film grossed the lowest worldwide?
20. Who does not appear in the prequel trilogy: Lindsay Duncan, Barbara Crampton or Rose Byrne?

DIDN'T HE/SHE DO WELL! See how you did with our arbitrary scoring system



16-20

OBI-WAN KENOBI

Congratulations! You have the skills of a Jedi Master and will forever be one of the coolest characters in your entire franchise, even in ghost form. Literally everyone wants you on their quiz team.

11-15

PADMÉ AMIDALA

Well done on being a bit better than mediocre in a world filled with villains and nuisances. You will be remembered fondly in the quiz circuit for a little while until someone cooler comes along.

6-10

ANAKIN SKYWALKER

It's always sad when youths with so much potential end up scoring low in quizzes and murdering younglings. It's never too late to turn your life back around.

0-5

JAR JAR BINKS

You are officially the worst, and probably a bit racist. Is there anything you don't mess up? Go find a mirror and take a long, hard look at yourself, if you can bear it. What a disgrace you are.

1. SUPREME CHANCELLOR VALORUM 2. SABB 3. TOYDARIAN 4. ANAKIN SKYWALKER'S MOTHER 5. COUNT DOKU 6. MOS ESPA 7. CONCORD DAWN 8. IN THE JEDI TEMPLE ON CORUSCANT 9. LAKE PAONGA 10. NEMOIDA 11. AGOLTERGA 12. 15 MINUTES AND 42 SECONDS 13. SHEET 14. JOCASTA NU 15. "THANK YOU, MY MASTER" 16. CELIA IMRIE 17. JOHN WILLIAMS 18. JONATHAN HALES 19. EPISODE II - ATTACK OF THE CLONES 20. BARBARA CRAMPTON

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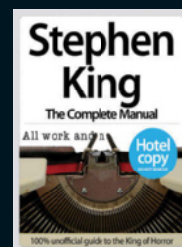
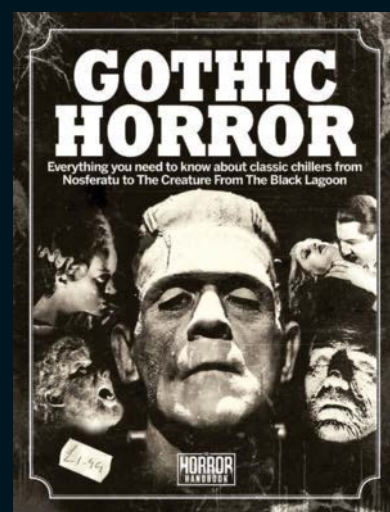


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